Cook's Country

JULY 2016

Citrus-Braised Pork Tacos

We fell for these in Los Angeles and then spent six weeks creating a home recipe.

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Grilled Bourbon Steaks
Extra Char, Extra Flavor

Fried Peach Hand Pies
Peach Perfection

Corn-Poblano Chowder
Creamy, Silky, Flavorful

Backyard Baked Beans
New Approach with Bacon

Cooking Class: Grilled Boneless Chicken Breasts

Fried Red Tomatoes
That's Right, Red

Smashed Potato Salad
Plus: Mayo Showdown

Pulled Turkey Sandwiches
Tennessee Discovery

Taste Test: Hot Dogs
We Ate 300 Dogs

Mississippi Mud Pie
Even More Chocolaty

Texas Smoked Pork Chops
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WHAT KEEPS US going here in the test kitchen, besides the unending intake of calories, is the pervasive sense that everything we think we know for sure is up for reconsideration, retesting, revision, and refinement.

Take, for example, our recipe for Grilled Bourbon Steaks on page 11 of this issue. When this idea first came up for discussion, most of us dismissed it as nonsense. After all, we've grilled thousands of steaks over the years with excellent results. Why would we take something so perfect and simple as a grilled rib eye and clobber it with a boozy, potentially cloying marinade? Balderdash.

But our executive food editor, Bryan Roof, saw possibility. With photographer Steve Klise in tow, Roof made a beeline for Jesse's Restaurant in Magnolia Springs, Alabama, 1,500 miles away from the test kitchen, to sample their signature steak. He returned with good news: Bourbon-marinated steak isn't nonsense. In fact, it's a brilliant idea that should be shared with the world. And after associate editor Ashley Moore (above, right) spent several weeks perfecting our recipe, the rest of us were convinced, too.

Another satisfying reminder that there are no sacred cows in *Cook's Country*. And no sacred steaks.

TUCKER SHAW

Executive Editor

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ON THE COVER: CITRUS-BRAISED PORK TACOS
Keller + Keller, Catrine Kelty
ILLUSTRATION: Greg Stevenson

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AMERICA'S TEST KITCHEN
RECIPES THAT WORK®

America's Test Kitchen is a real 2,500-square-foot kitchen located just outside Boston. It is the home of more than 60 test cooks, editors, and cookware specialists. Our mission is to test recipes until we understand exactly how and why they work and eventually arrive at the very best version. We also test kitchen equipment and supermarket ingredients in search of products that offer the best value and performance. You can watch us work by tuning in to *America's Test Kitchen* (AmericasTestKitchen.com) and *Cook's Country from America's Test Kitchen* (CooksCountry.com) on public television and listen to us on our weekly radio program on PRX. You can also follow us on Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and Instagram.

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Fresh strawberry jam that doesn't take all day and doesn't taste like syrup? Yes, please.

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A few simple tricks help us coax satisfying flavor from sweet fresh corn and spicy poblano chiles.

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Puffy chicken fingers smothered in a way-too-sweet sauce? No thanks. This go-to takeout dish from my childhood needed an update.

20 Fried Peach Hand Pies
After sampling this unbelievably delicious Alabama specialty, even the fry-shy wanted in on the act.

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Our approach to Mississippi mud pie was clear: When in doubt, add more chocolate.

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Ask Cook's Country

BY MORGAN BOLLING

Basting Brush Blues

I saw a chef on TV basting meat on the grill with a brush made of herb bunches tied to a wooden spoon. It looked cool, but does this actually add flavor?
Meg Haber, Lexington, Ky.

To test the effectiveness of a homemade herb brush, we put one together by tying bunches of parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme to the handle of a wooden spoon using kitchen twine. We brushed butter onto chicken breasts and flank steaks as we grilled them using both the herb brush and a regular silicone basting brush; we also cooked a third sample of each that we didn't baste but instead sauced with herb butter when it came off the grill.

Most tasters could detect only a slight herb presence in the chicken basted with the herb brush. With more flavorful flank steak, however, tasters weren't able to detect a difference in either basted sample. In both tests the meats topped with herb butter had the most herb presence by far.

THE BOTTOM LINE: While an herb basting brush looks impressive, it doesn't contribute much flavor. Serving meat with herb butter gives it much more flavor with less expense and effort.

FLASHY BUT INEFFECTIVE
Skip the herb brush.

Coffee Quandary

When a dessert recipe calls for espresso powder, can I grind my own espresso or dark-roast coffee beans to a fine powder and use that? Or do I have to buy a special espresso powder at the store?
Rene Andersen, Sacramento, Calif.

Pleasantly bitter, ultraconcentrated instant espresso powder can be a baker's secret weapon—just a pinch pumps up chocolate flavor considerably without imparting a coffee flavor. The powder is made by brewing espresso-style coffee, dehydrating it, and grinding the solids into a fine powder.

To test if finely ground espresso beans would work as a substitute, we made two batches of two of our recipes calling for this ingredient, Chocolate Crinkle Cookies and Hazelnut-Mocha Truffles. In one batch we used instant espresso powder and in the other, freshly ground espresso beans. In the cookies, a few tasters thought the sample with instant powder tasted "more chocolaty" and "complex," but the difference was minor, and tasters thought both were acceptable. The truffles, however, were a different story. The freshly ground espresso did not dissolve, leaving what should have been a creamy truffle with gritty coffee bits.

To make sure we covered all our bases, we repeated these tests using regular ground coffee instead of ground espresso beans. The truffles turned out unacceptably gritty, and the cookies had a clear taste of coffee and left tasters picking bits of grounds from their teeth.

THE BOTTOM LINE: You can use ground espresso beans (but not regular ground coffee) in place of instant espresso powder in most baked goods. But when a recipe requires a smooth texture, like truffles, stick with instant espresso powder.

No Beef About It

What is the best substitute for beef broth when converting a recipe for a vegetarian? I want to maintain rich flavor.
Marjorie Collicutt, Wentworth, N.H.

ROASTING BUILDS SAVORY FLAVOR
This vegetarian broth is rich and "meaty."

While you could certainly use vegetable broth instead of beef broth, it's not always the best option. That's because vegetable broth is meant to highlight the light, sweet flavor of vegetables, while beef broth should be rich, meaty, and savory. (Our favorite store-bought beef broth, Better Than Bouillon Beef Base, hits these points.)

We set out to create a meat-free substitute that would match the flavors of beef broth. Our plan was to work with ingredients that build savory flavors, including some that are high in glutamates, the chemical compounds that create umami flavor: soy sauce, tomato paste, miso, Vegemite, Marmite, mushrooms, onions, and liquid smoke. After more than a week of testing, we had a recipe made in a roasting pan that mimics the rich, deep flavors of good beef broth. It requires more than an hour of oven time, so it's not as fast as opening a carton of vegetable broth, but the flavor payoff is worth it. Try this broth in your favorite recipe for French onion soup or vegetable chili.

VEGETARIAN "BEEF" BROTH

Makes about 4 cups

- **1 pound button mushrooms, sliced thin**
- **1 onion, sliced thin**
- **2 celery ribs, chopped**
- **1 carrot, chopped**
- **2 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **1 tablespoon tomato paste**
- **3 garlic cloves, unpeeled**
- **8 cups water**
- **2½ teaspoons salt**

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 450 degrees. Combine mushrooms, onion, celery, carrot, oil, tomato paste, and garlic in large roasting pan.

2. Roast until vegetables are tender and very dark in color, 35 to 40 minutes. Add water to pan. Continue to roast until water is reduced by half, about 30 minutes. Strain through fine-mesh strainer and discard solids. Stir in salt and let cool completely. Broth can be refrigerated for 3 days or frozen for up to 1 month.

Saving Squash

My garden is overrun with zucchini. I've heard that it doesn't freeze well but wanted to see if you had any advice.
Patrick Keaton, Mooresville, N.C.

We know that high-moisture vegetables like zucchini (which is about 95 percent water by weight) don't freeze well, but we asked around the test kitchen to see if our cooks had any tips. One suggested we try preparing the zucchini as we sometimes do for zucchini bread or sautéing: grated on the large holes of a box grater and squeezed in a clean dish towel to remove excess moisture. We prepared zucchini this way and froze it. When we defrosted it a few days later, the grated squash was limp and sitting in its own liquid. When we sautéed this frozen and defrosted zucchini, the results were unappealingly mealy and too soft. But when we added the defrosted shreds to our recipe for zucchini bread, tasters were none the wiser.

To freeze zucchini for later use in zucchini bread, grate it on the large holes of a box grater and squeeze it dry. Freeze it in portions in zipper-lock bags, and thaw it before adding it to the batter. If liquid accumulates in the bag with the defrosted squash, add it to the batter. If you don't, the bread will end up being dry.

THE BOTTOM LINE: Because of its high water content, frozen and thawed zucchini turns mushy when sautéed. It's fine, however, to use frozen and thawed grated zucchini in zucchini bread.

Salmon Origins

My grocery store sells frozen "Atlantic salmon," but the package says "product of Chile." What gives?
Julie Morrison, Ardmore, Pa.

The short answer is that "Atlantic salmon" refers to a species of salmon, not to the ocean from which they were caught.

Atlantic salmon did originate in the Atlantic Ocean. But nowadays most Atlantic salmon sold in the United States is raised on farms in Norway, Scotland, Chile, and Canada. Similarly, Pacific salmon—which includes sockeye, coho, and Chinook (also called king)—originated in the North Pacific Ocean. Most Pacific salmon sold in this country is wild-caught in the American Northwest, British Columbia, and Alaska and has a more assertive flavor and a lower fat content than farmed Atlantic salmon.

THE BOTTOM LINE: "Atlantic" and "Pacific" refer to types of salmon, not to the places they were caught. Most Atlantic salmon sold in this country is farm-raised, and most Pacific salmon is wild-caught.

FARMED SALMON
Atlantic salmon has more fat and a mild flavor.

WILD SALMON
Pacific salmon has less fat and more flavor.

To ask us a cooking question, visit **CooksCountry.com/ask**. Or write to Ask Cook's Country, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Just try to stump us!

Kitchen Shortcuts

COMPILED BY DIANE UNGER

EASY TRICK **Quicker Whipper**
Peggy First, Bethesda, Md.

My family loves homemade whipped cream on just about anything, but a full batch is usually too much, and my mixer doesn't do a good job with small amounts. I discovered that I could easily whip cream with my immersion blender. I put about 1 cup of cream in a 4-cup glass measuring cup (a quart takeout container works well, too), add sugar and vanilla, and blend for 30 to 45 seconds. Perfect whipped cream, every time.

TIDY TIP
Stuck on You
Danny Davis, Raleigh, N.C.

To help keep things organized and handy in my kitchen, I glued small magnets to my spice containers. Then I affixed a small metal baking sheet to the inside of my pantry door; I stick all the containers on the sheet, where they stay in plain sight so I can find them easily.

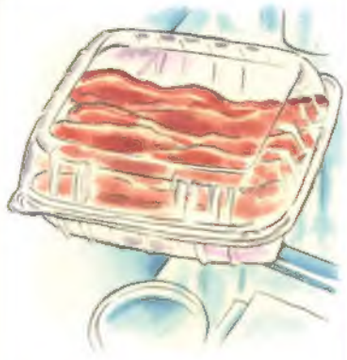
STORAGE SOLUTION
Wrap and Roll
John Weinbaum,
West Hartford, Conn.

I like to take my knives and essential spices with me when I go on vacation, as my wife and I prefer to cook for ourselves. To keep things organized, I use a compartmented small wrench roll (which you can buy at a hardware store). I put my knives safely in one side and my spices in small vials in the other side.

Submit a tip online at **CooksCountry.com/kitchenshortcuts** or send a letter to Kitchen Shortcuts, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name, address, and phone number. If we publish your tip, you will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. Letters may be edited for clarity and length.

CLEVER TRICK
Stress Reduction
Mary Ellen Wheeler, Warwick, R.I.

I never felt comfortable when a recipe called for a sauce to be reduced by half, as I always felt I was playing a guessing game as to when it was properly reduced. But found a good work-around: I dip a wooden chopstick in the sauce, pull it out, mark the level by cutting a shallow notch with a paring knife, and then make a second notch at the halfway point. Now I have a marker to know exactly when I've hit the proper reduction.



TIMESAVING TIP
Bacon on the Fly
Huldah Taylor, Chalfont, Pa.

I love a few strips of bacon with my morning bagel, but I don't have the time to fry it up before work. Instead, I cook big batches of bacon on the weekends, let them cool, and freeze the strips in plastic containers. On weekday mornings, I quickly reheat a few strips in a skillet or a microwave. The bacon is crispy and tastes as good as fresh.

DOUBLE DUTY
Brewing Up Cocktails
Sally Muldoon, Phoenix, Ariz.

My husband and I have date night cocktails at home every Friday night, but we don't own a cocktail shaker. The hubby, clever guy that he is, came up with a great alternative: our French press coffee maker. He loads in the ice and the drink ingredients, gives them a good stir, presses the plunger down, and pours. Cheers!

TIDY TIP
Measure and Tear
Phyllis McConkey,
Palo Alto, Calif.

I've always had a hard time tearing clean sheets of aluminum foil from the roll. To get foil sheets without jagged edges, I pull out a long piece of foil, line a ruler up, and carefully tear the foil against the ruler edge. I get a clean cut every time.

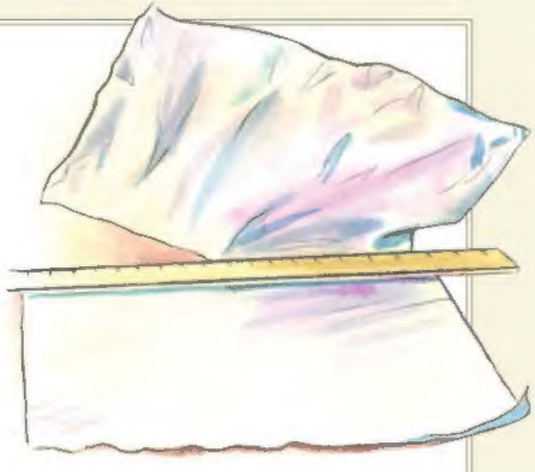


Illustration: Ross MacDonald

Texas Thick-Cut Smoked Pork Chops

Was it possible to get that pit-smoked Texas flavor with nothing but a charcoal grill?

BY ASHLEY MOORE

On the Road
Bigger in Texas

The drive through Texas Hill Country to the town of Llano is desolately beautiful, with long stretches of dusty dirt broken up by patches of electric-green shrubs and stout trees. The weathered roads are wide, though traffic rarely comes.

I turn into the parking lot of Cooper's Old Time Pit Bar-B-Que, a boxy crimson building that's impossible to miss. I nearly walk right past the line that's formed at the door before a young man in a camo hat and a soot-blackened apron calls me back to ask what I'll have. He grabs a plastic lunch tray and lines it with butcher paper as I mull over my choices: barky brisket, slabs of mahogany ribs, giant pork chops.

He loads my tray with a slice of this, a link of that, and a pork chop, and then points to a deep pot of sauce at the end of the pit. Common wisdom holds that good barbecue doesn't need sauce, so I confidently decline. He ignores me and, in one swift motion, grabs my chop with tongs, dunks it, and returns it to my tray. I consider protesting but think better of it and move inside to eat.

When I cut into the tender chop, the sauce, surprisingly bright with vinegar, clings jealously, beautifully to it. A new lesson: Listen to the pitmaster. –BRYAN ROOF

Venison chops aren't on the menu, but the thick pork chops more than suffice.

Big chops demand big flavor; we get it from brining, seasoning, smoking, and saucing these massive chops.

COOPER'S OLD TIME Pit Bar-B-Que in Llano, Texas (see "On the Road"), is famous for the "Big Chop," a massive, 2-inch-thick bone-in pork rib chop seasoned and grilled over mesquite coals before being dunked into a pungent sauce.

Pork chops tend to dry out on the grill, so to prevent this in my recipe, I turned to brining (soaking meat in a saltwater solution). The dissolved salt is drawn into the meat by diffusion, seasoning it and helping it stay juicy.

After a few tests, I knew that a simple saltwater brine was helping keep the meat tender and moist, but I noticed that I was no longer getting much browning on the exterior of the chops. Since sugar helps promote browning, I added 3 tablespoons to the brine. After I had patted the chops dry with a paper towel, they were ready for seasoning.

Cooper's seasoning mix contains salt, pepper, onion powder, and granulated garlic. For my four big chops, I settled on 1½ tablespoons of kosher salt, 2 tablespoons of pepper, and 2 teaspoons each of onion powder and granulated garlic, which I would sprinkle over both sides of the chops just before grilling.

Before dropping the chops on the grill, I did some tinkering in the kitchen to produce a postgrill barbecue sauce reminiscent of Cooper's. I started by rendering whole bacon pieces, which would be easy to remove before serving but would leave deep flavor behind. I stirred in some grated onions and added cider vinegar for acidity.

Photo: Left, Charlotte Wilder

Chicken broth won out over water as the best liquid. And for a little extra smoky flavor, I stirred in a bit of liquid smoke. Hot sauce gave it kick.

I put my brined, seasoned chops on the cooler side of a hot fire bolstered with soaked mesquite chips for authentic Hill Country flavor. To insulate the meat and keep it from cooking too quickly, I positioned the chops so the bones faced the charcoal. It wasn't long before the mesquite began to smoke, and for 45 minutes, the chops gently cooked through. And sure enough, the sugar in the brine helped them achieve a rich brown crust.

After letting the chops rest for 10 minutes and saucing them, I called my tasters, sliced off chunks of pork, and passed them around.

A chorus of yums ensued, and I knew my meaty, juicy, smoky chops had done Texas proud.

TEXAS THICK-CUT SMOKED PORK CHOPS Serves 8

Each chop can easily serve two people. Grate the onion for the sauce on the large holes of a box grater. Our preferred hot sauce is Frank's RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce. If you'd like to use wood chunks instead of wood chips when using a charcoal grill, substitute two medium chunks, soaked in water for 1 hour, for the wood chip packet.

PORK

- Kosher salt and pepper
- 3 tablespoons sugar
- 4 (18- to 20-ounce) bone-in pork rib chops, 2 inches thick
- 2 teaspoons onion powder
- 2 teaspoons granulated garlic
- 2 cups mesquite wood chips

BARBECUE SAUCE

- 2 slices bacon
- ¼ cup grated onion
- Kosher salt and pepper
- ¾ cup cider vinegar
- 1¼ cups chicken broth
- 1 cup ketchup
- 2 tablespoons hot sauce
- ½ teaspoon liquid smoke

1. FOR THE PORK: Dissolve 6 tablespoons salt and sugar in 1½ quarts cold water in large container. Submerge chops in brine, cover, and refrigerate for 1 hour. Combine onion powder, granulated garlic, 1½ tablespoons salt, and 2 tablespoons pepper in bowl; set aside.

2. FOR THE BARBECUE SAUCE: Cook bacon in medium saucepan over medium heat until fat begins to render and bacon begins to brown, 4 to 6 minutes. Add onion and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook until softened, 2 to 4 minutes. Stir in vinegar, scraping up any browned bits, and cook until slightly thickened, about 2 minutes.

3. Stir in broth, ketchup, hot sauce, liquid smoke, and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Bring to simmer and cook until slightly thickened, about 15 minutes, stirring occasionally. Discard bacon and season with salt and pepper to taste. Remove from heat, cover, and keep warm.

4. Just before grilling, soak wood chips in water for 15 minutes, then drain. Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in 8 by 4½-inch foil packet. (Make sure chips do not poke holes in sides or bottom of packet.) Cut 2 evenly spaced 2-inch slits in top of packet. Remove chops from brine and pat dry with paper towels. Season chops all over with reserved spice mixture.

5A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter three-quarters filled with charcoal briquettes (4½ quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Place wood chip packet on coals. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 5 minutes.

5B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Remove cooking grate and place wood chip packet directly on primary burner. Set grate in place, turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 15 minutes. Leave primary burner on medium-high and turn off other burner(s). (Adjust primary burner as needed to maintain grill temperature around 325 degrees.)

6. Clean and oil cooking grate. Arrange chops on cooler side of grill with bone ends toward fire. Cook, covered (positioning lid vent over chops if using charcoal), until chops register 140 degrees, 45 to 50 minutes, flipping halfway through cooking.

7. Transfer chops to platter, tent with foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Brush chops generously with warm sauce and serve, passing remaining sauce separately.

Make It Mesquite

Smoky, peaty mesquite is the wood of choice in Llano, Texas, and its unique flavor is key to these pork chops; hickory is too pungent, apple too sweet, and oak too mild. Mesquite chips are available at most hardware stores and online.

Grilled Broccoli

We wanted tender, not tough. BY CECELIA JENKINS

STEAMING, SAUTÉING, OR microwaving broccoli is fine, but if you want vivid green florets with flavorful charred accents, you can't beat the grill.

Peeling the stalks with a vegetable peeler is key to avoid toughness. I cut the head into spears with 3- to 4-inch-wide florets and ½- to ¾-inch-thick stems: small enough to cook through but large enough to grill easily.

But even after carefully cutting it this way, I couldn't get the broccoli cooked through before it burned. I'd need to precook it. I tried blanching, microwaving, and steaming, and the latter proved best. But could I steam on the grill?

Yes, by using foil "hobo packs." I tossed the spears in an oil mixture, divided them evenly between two sheets of foil, and wrapped them up. Flipping the packs halfway through ensured even cooking. I then removed the spears from the foil and placed them directly on the grill. I had soft, charred florets and sweet, tender stems. A simple squirt of lemon sealed the deal.

GRILLED BROCCOLI WITH LEMON AND PARMESAN Serves 4

To keep the packs from tearing, use heavy-duty aluminum foil. Use the large holes of a box grater to shred the Parmesan. For additional grilled broccoli recipes, go to **CooksCountry.com/july16**.

- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 1 tablespoon water
- Salt and pepper
- 2 pounds broccoli
- 1 lemon, halved
- ¼ cup shredded Parmesan cheese

1. Cut two 26 by 12-inch sheets of heavy-duty aluminum foil. Whisk oil, water, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl.

2. Trim stalk ends so each entire head of broccoli measures 6 to 7 inches long. Using vegetable peeler, peel away tough outer layer of broccoli stalks (about ⅛ inch). Cut stalks in half lengthwise into spears (stems should be ½ to ¾ inch thick and florets 3 to 4 inches wide). Add broccoli spears to oil mixture and toss well to coat.

We quickly precook the spears in a foil packet before browning them over the hot coals.

3. Divide broccoli between sheets of foil, cut side down and alternating direction of florets and stems. Bring short sides of foil together and crimp tightly. Crimp long ends to seal packs tightly.

4A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

4B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn all burners to medium-high. (Adjust burners as needed to maintain grill temperature around 400 degrees.)

5. Clean and oil cooking grate. Arrange packs evenly on grill (over coals if using charcoal), cover, and cook for 8 minutes, flipping packs halfway through cooking.

6. Transfer packs to rimmed baking sheet and, using scissors, carefully cut open, allowing steam to escape away from you. (Broccoli should be bright green and fork inserted into stems should meet some resistance.)

7. Discard foil and place broccoli and lemon halves cut side down on grill (over coals if using charcoal). Grill (covered if using gas), turning broccoli about every 2 minutes, until stems are fork-tender and well charred on all sides, 6 to 8 minutes total. (Transfer broccoli to now-empty sheet as it finishes cooking.) Grill lemon halves until well charred on cut side, 6 to 8 minutes.

8. Transfer broccoli to cutting board and cut into 2-inch pieces; transfer to platter. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Squeeze lemon over broccoli to taste, sprinkle with Parmesan, and drizzle with extra oil. Serve.

Tennessee Pulled Turkey Sandwiches

Move over, pork. It's turkey time.

BY MORGAN BOLLING

WHEN I GO for barbecue, I typically order my longtime favorite, pulled pork. But when a Tennessee friend recently raved about a local sandwich featuring shreds of juicy turkey breast tossed with a tangy white barbecue sauce, she caught my attention. She spoke of turkey so moist that its juices seeped into the bun, with just enough smokiness to enhance—not overpower—the delicate meat. The rich mayonnaise-based sauce, she said, was an ideal condiment for the lean turkey. I'm a hard sell when it comes to my barbecue routine, but her devotion convinced me to try something new.

I found dozens of recipes online and in the test kitchen library and selected a handful to try. Six turkey breasts and a bag of charcoal later, I was disappointed to find that none of the recipes lived up to the revered sandwich. Most of the sandwiches were overpoweringly smoky or so full of spice that any turkey flavor was lost. The most unsettling part, however, was the texture, which was uniformly cardboard-like. The problem was that most of the recipes had been designed for the low, controlled temperature of a smoker. Since I'd used a charcoal grill (a more accessible option), the turkey had cooked too quickly.

I'd have to create a grill-friendly recipe from scratch. First up: the troublesome anatomy of a bone-in turkey breast. The breastbone juts out in an awkward way, making a portion of the meat sit up high on the grill grate and cook unevenly. I could have removed the bone to make the meat lie flat, but the easier option was to simply purchase boneless split turkey breasts. But without any bones to protect the meat, producing juicy turkey would be even more of a challenge.

Cooking with indirect heat made sense, since it would allow the turkey to slowly heat up on the cooler side of the grill. The problem was that producing a slow, steady fire meant starting with a small amount of coals and periodically lifting the hot grill grate to add more—a procedure that was too precarious for my liking. But getting the meat to reach the target temperature of 160 degrees before a single chimney of charcoal died out meant cooking it relatively quickly. On the plus side, this meant that the breasts were on and off the grill in an hour. The downside? Dry turkey.

I knew that rubbing the turkey with salt and letting it sit overnight would help it retain some of its juices. Sure enough, compared with breasts that had been salted immediately before going on the grill, the turkey that had been salted the previous day was thoroughly seasoned and somewhat moister. A sprinkling of black pepper and cayenne right before grilling added a bit of spiciness.

Things were looking up, but I still wanted the turkey to be more moist. While more traditional barbecue cuts like fatty pork butt or beef brisket turn meltingly tender as the fat renders during a long stint on the grill, turkey just dries out. With that in mind, I decided to combat the leanness in a direct way: by adding fat. Transferring the turkey to a disposable aluminum pan and smearing it with butter partway through cooking did the trick, adding richness and moisture to the meat. After testing, I found that cooking the turkey in the pan the whole time shielded it too much from the smoke, whereas moving it to the pan too late made it overly smoky. Making the transfer when the turkey reached 120 degrees delivered the right balance of smoke and moisture.

Speaking of smoke, achieving smoky flavor was simple since most types of smoke are water-soluble, and turkey contains a large amount of water.

We salt the turkey a day ahead to ensure juicy, thoroughly seasoned meat. Our Alabama-style white sauce adds even more flavor.

I found that 2 cups of soaked wood chips smoldered just enough to give the turkey a substantial but not overpowering level of smoke. Once the meat was done, I shredded it and mixed it with the delicious blend of turkey juices and butter that was left behind in the roasting pan, making it moister still.

The only thing missing was the white barbecue sauce. Unfamiliar in most areas of the United States, this mixture of mayonnaise and vinegar reigns supreme in Alabama and a handful of its border states. Adding some horseradish, Worcestershire sauce, garlic, and both black and cayenne peppers to the sauce gave it a complex kick that complemented my smoky, juicy turkey.

The next time I'm at a barbecue joint, I just might order smoked turkey. But after eating my own succulent creation, I feel that the bar would be high.

TENNESSEE PULLED TURKEY SANDWICHES

Serves 8 to 10

We prefer a natural (unbrined) turkey breast here, but both self-basting and kosher work well. Plan ahead: The salted meat needs to be refrigerated for at least 8 hours. Skip the salting step if you buy a kosher or self-basting breast. Some stores sell only boneless turkey breasts with the skin still attached; the skin can be removed easily with a paring knife. If you don't have ½ cup of juices from the rested turkey, supplement with chicken broth.

TURKEY

- **2 (1¾- to 2-pound) boneless, skinless split turkey breasts, trimmed**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**
- **2 cups wood chips**
- **½ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- **1 (13 by 9-inch) disposable aluminum roasting pan**
- **4 tablespoons unsalted butter, cut into 4 pieces**

WHITE BARBECUE SAUCE

- **1 cup mayonnaise**
- **⅓ cup cider vinegar**
- **1 tablespoon prepared horseradish, drained**
- **1½ teaspoons kosher salt**
- **1 teaspoon Worcestershire sauce**
- **1 garlic clove, minced**
- **1 teaspoon pepper**
- **¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**

- **8 hamburger buns**
- **Shredded iceberg lettuce**

1. FOR THE TURKEY: Pat turkey dry with paper towels, place on large sheet of plastic wrap, and sprinkle with 1 tablespoon salt. Wrap in plastic and refrigerate for at least 8 hours or overnight.

2. Just before grilling, soak wood chips in water for 15 minutes, then drain. Using large piece of heavy-duty aluminum foil, wrap soaked chips in 8 by 4½-inch foil packet. (Make sure chips do not poke holes in sides or bottom of packet.) Cut 2 evenly spaced 2-inch slits in top of packet.

3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter three-quarters filled with charcoal briquettes (4½ quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over half of grill. Place wood chip packet on coals. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 5 minutes.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Remove cooking grate and place wood chip packet directly on primary burner. Set grate in place, turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot and wood chips are smoking, about 15 minutes. Leave primary burner on medium-high and turn off other burner(s). (Adjust primary burner as needed to maintain grill temperature between 300 and 350 degrees.)

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Unwrap turkey and sprinkle with 2 teaspoons pepper and cayenne. Place turkey on cooler side of grill, with thicker parts of breasts closest to fire. Cover grill (positioning lid vent directly over turkey if using charcoal) and cook until breasts register 120 degrees, 30 to 40 minutes.

5. Transfer turkey to disposable pan and top with butter. Cover pan tightly with foil and return to cooler side of grill. Cover grill and continue to cook until breasts register 160 degrees, 25 to 35 minutes longer. Remove pan from grill and let turkey rest in covered pan for 20 minutes.

6. FOR THE WHITE BARBECUE SAUCE: Whisk all ingredients in bowl until smooth.

7. Transfer turkey to cutting board. Using two forks or your hands, shred turkey into bite-size pieces. Transfer to large bowl. Add ½ cup juices from pan to shredded turkey and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

8. Serve turkey on buns with white barbecue sauce and lettuce.

KEY STEP **Top 'em with Butter**

To add richness and help keep the turkey moist, we transfer the partially cooked breasts to a disposable pan and top them with butter before covering the pan with foil.

Should You Buy a Grill Light? It's Complicated.

Grill lights are portable, battery-powered LED lamps that latch onto your grill's handles (or side tables) to illuminate the cooking surface. Looking for the best, we rounded up 14 models, including some designed for camping, to put through their paces.

We tested each light's compatibility with six grills (a mix of gas and charcoal models). Then we took each one into a dark room and used a light meter to measure brightness both in the center of the grill, where each light was aimed, and on the periphery. Finally, we went outside and grilled burgers in the dark, using each of the grill lights as our only illumination.

Our winning light illuminated the entire grill.

While every model helped cut through the dark, they all had problems, the biggest of which was the ability to evenly illuminate the entire cooking surface—most could light up only a few burgers on a full grill, making it hard to see char and gauge doneness. Some projected narrow spotlights that washed out the cooks' view of most of the food. Design flaws included flimsy, weak clamps or latches; the inability to attach to some or all grills; long necks that drooped of their own accord; or short, stubby necks that couldn't be positioned to light properly.

We didn't find a perfect light, but our testing uncovered a few models that do make it easier to grill in the dark. The best of these, from Ivation, attached to every grill and threw a warm spread of light over most of the grill surface. It did not, however, attach as securely as we would have liked. Go to **CooksCountry.com/july16** for the full story and testing chart. –LAUREN SAVOIE

RECOMMENDED

IVATION Multipurpose Gooseneck 7-LED Dimmable Clip Light
Model: IVACLED
Price: $24.99
Style: Clip
Weatherproof: No

CRITERIA	
Brightness	★★★
Coverage	★★★
Stability	★½
Compatibility	★★★
Ease of Use	★★

TESTERS' NOTES: This model was the brightest of the bunch, with an even, wide spread of warm light that allowed us to easily see char and gauge the doneness of the food. While this light stood freely on side tables and clipped effortlessly to handles, it was easily jostled and displaced whenever we moved the grill or lid.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

BLACKFIRE Clamplight Waterproof
Model: BBM905
Price: $24.95
Style: Clip
Weatherproof: Yes

CRITERIA	
Brightness	★★★
Coverage	★
Stability	★★★
Compatibility	★★★
Ease of Use	★★

TESTERS' NOTES: Testers loved this durable, waterproof camping light's sturdy, simple clamp, which easily attached to all grill handles and didn't budge. It could also be configured to stand freely on a side table for grills without handles. Unfortunately, its brightness was concentrated like a spotlight in the middle of the grill, producing glare and making it hard to get a good look at the food.

CUISINART Grilluminate Extending LED Grill Light
Model: CGL-330
Price: $24.44
Style: Screw on
Weatherproof: No

CRITERIA	
Brightness	★
Coverage	★★★
Stability	★★★
Compatibility	★½
Ease of Use	★★½

TESTERS' NOTES: This light, which has two extending light panels, cast a wide spread of soft light that was fine for maneuvering food around the grill but a bit too weak for gauging char and doneness of burgers. It also didn't fit on grills without handles, and its stubby neck had trouble extending past the lid on some larger grills.

TIP **Don't Trust the Pop**

Ignore the pop-up timer that comes with some turkey breasts; the meat will be overcooked long before the popper pops. You should gauge doneness only with an instant-read thermometer. But don't remove the pop-up timer until the meat is done and has rested; otherwise it will leave a hole from which juices will flow, leaving you with a dried-out, totally uninspiring turkey. Our favorite instant-read thermometer is the **ThermoWorks Thermapen Mk4**.

Smashed Potato Salad

Finding the perfect balance of smooth and chunky potatoes for this Southern side was a lesson in restraint. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

IMAGINE CREAMY MASHED potatoes crossed with tangy, chunky potato salad. This style is nothing new if you're from certain corners of the South, where mashing (or smashing) the potatoes in potato salad is business as usual. But in our Boston-based test kitchen, this was a new approach.

Many recipes advocate using unpeeled potatoes to give the salad a rustic look. Cooking times are loose, as is the nomenclature: The line between "smashed" and "mashed" is vaguely defined, but the goal is a salad with a mix of textures—partly chunky, partly smooth. Potato salads that use a ricer, food mill, or stand mixer to more thoroughly break down the potatoes head squarely into mashed potato territory, a region I wanted to avoid; who wants a whole bowl of cold mashed potatoes?

But developing a smashed potato recipe with varied and—importantly—reproducible texture meant setting some ground rules. Choosing the right potato was the first step. If I wanted to omit peeling the potatoes (and I sure did), Yukon Golds worked best when I tested them against russets and red potatoes. While russets make great mashed potatoes, their starchy flesh became pasty when mixed into a salad. And while red potatoes had decent mashability, their skins were tougher and less appealing in the salad than those of the Yukons. I cooked the Yukons until they were just tender, drained them, and then followed a test kitchen trick, seasoning the still-hot potato chunks with a splash of vinegar for deep flavor.

Getting the best ratio of chunks to mash took some experimenting. Gently smashing an entire bowl of cooked potatoes yielded inconsistent results: Some batches were too smooth, others too chunky. The easiest way to get enough smooth potatoes to bind the salad but enough chunks to give it some texture was to fully mash a set amount of potatoes and then add the mashed portion to the rest of the salad. I settled on removing about one-third of the total potatoes for smashing. The rest I spread onto a baking sheet to let cool for 15 minutes, which helped them keep their shape.

Mashing just a portion of the cooked potatoes adds texture to this dish.

Southern purists insist that Duke's mayonnaise (see "Mayo Showdown") is the only acceptable mayo for potato salad. Since mail order wasn't in the cards for this recipe, however, I used the test kitchen's favorite nationally available mayo (Hellmann's, or Best Foods west of the Rockies) and increased the tang with a few tablespoons of yellow mustard. One place I opted for some sweetness was with the pickles: Instead of the dill pickles or dill pickle relish we usually use in potato salad, I opted for bread-and-butter chips (although any type of sweet pickles will work).

A few hard-cooked eggs and some chopped celery added more texture to the mix, while a combination of onion and scallions gave it an edge.

SMASHED POTATO SALAD

Serves 8 to 10

Use the tip of a paring knife to judge the doneness of the potatoes. If the tip inserts easily into the potato pieces, they are done. Hellmann's Real Mayonnaise is our favorite nationally available mayonnaise. Note that the salad needs to be refrigerated for about 2 hours before serving.

- **3 pounds Yukon Gold potatoes, unpeeled, cut into 1-inch chunks**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **2 tablespoons distilled white vinegar**
- **1 cup mayonnaise**
- **3 tablespoons yellow mustard**
- **¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper**
- **3 hard-cooked large eggs, chopped**
- **3 scallions, sliced thin**
- **½ cup chopped sweet pickles**
- **½ cup finely chopped celery**
- **¼ cup finely chopped onion**

1. Combine potatoes, 8 cups water, and 1 tablespoon salt in Dutch oven and bring to boil over high heat. Reduce heat to medium and cook at vigorous simmer until potatoes are tender, 14 to 17 minutes.

2. Drain potatoes in colander. Transfer 3 cups potatoes to large bowl, add 1 tablespoon vinegar, and coarsely mash with potato masher. Transfer remaining potatoes to rimmed baking sheet, drizzle with remaining 1 tablespoon vinegar, and toss gently to combine. Let cool completely, about 15 minutes.

3. Whisk mayonnaise, ½ cup water, mustard, cayenne, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Stir mayonnaise mixture into mashed potatoes. Fold in eggs, scallions, pickles, celery, onion, and remaining potatoes until combined. (Mixture will be lumpy.)

4. Cover and refrigerate until fully chilled, about 2 hours. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

Mayo Showdown

Commercial mayonnaise is one of the most hotly debated ingredients out there, with impassioned salad- and sandwich-makers insisting that only their favorite will do. Here are three of the most well-loved mayos.

HELLMANN'S

(sold as Best Foods west of the Rockies) The most popular brand in the U.S., Hellmann's accounts for about half of all mayonnaise sales.

DUKE'S

This spread is made with cider vinegar, which gives it a sharp flavor. It has ardent fans in many Southern states.

BLUE PLATE

The test kitchen's favorite mayo is made with egg yolks, not whole eggs. It must be mail-ordered in most of the country.

Backyard Barbecue Beans

Canned baked beans are not bad.
But with a few additions, they can be so much more. BY DIANE UNGER

A WHILE BACK, I was invited to a cookout, and I asked what I could bring. The host had all the big stuff handled (ribs, brisket, and his secret chicken recipe), so he requested a side dish. "Maybe beans?"

Being a native New Englander, I immediately thought of Boston baked beans. The day before the party, I started my beans soaking. The morning of, I got up at the crack of dawn to get the beans in a low oven to cook for 6 hours. The results were delicious, but I wanted more than just delicious. I wanted showstopping.

I wanted a less sweet, more assertively savory dish, one that would complement a full barbecue spread and serve a crowd. I was inspired by a friend of a friend, Daniel Gruskin of Lexington, Mass., who bolsters his baked beans with add ins like bacon and garlic. I resolved to do the same . . . and then some.

I decided to save time on the front end by using canned beans rather than dried. This decision freed me up to start with a multifaceted bean base, including pinto beans for their creaminess, cannellini beans for contrast, and traditional Boston style baked white beans for the slight sweetness I wanted (I chose Bush's for their consistency). I drained the pinto and cannellini beans but left the baked beans clinging to their sauce, which served as the foundation for my savory side dish. Once I'd combined them, it was time to pull out all the stops to transform these canned beans into something special.

I figured I'd bathe the beans in a simple pantry sauce, so I stirred together ketchup, mustard, and bottled barbecue sauce. Apple cider vinegar kept the sweetness in check, granulated garlic and cayenne pepper added a bit of heat, and a tiny touch of liquid smoke gave it an outdoor flavor. I combined my beans with the sauce, transferred everything to a large baking dish, and baked the mixture until it bubbled and turned lightly brown on top. After a 15 minute cooldown, I gathered my tasters for feed back. "Not bad" was one tepid response. "Needs something more" was another. Tough crowd, but they were right.

One of the initial recipes I'd tested included slightly spicy Ro-tel tomatoes in the mix, an idea I loved. It was also topped with 1 inch pieces of bacon. Of course, I thought: bacon.

With beans this good, we made enough to serve a crowd.

I liked the idea of adding a bonus meaty component, not just bacon, to my beans. Sausage and bratwurst were the easiest to find, so I made my next test a side by side by side sausage showdown: One batch got cooked bulk breakfast sausage, one hot Italian, and one brat wurst stirred in. I also added chopped onion to all three. I topped each batch with bacon (one batch got strips, another got minced, and the third got 1 inch pieces) and baked them until the bacon was rendered and crispy.

Tasters loved the sausage, and when I pressed them to choose a favorite, the consensus was bratwurst for its meaty but not overly intrusive flavor (the Italian was too spicy and the breakfast too breakfasty). As for the bacon, it was hard to go wrong, but for presentation and ease of serving, my tasters preferred the cobblestone effect of the 1 inch pieces arranged on top of the beans.

All that was left to do was hide the can opener and soak in the accolades.

Best for Baking

We tried several varieties of baked beans and found that firm, creamy **Bush's Original Recipe Baked Beans** held their shape best in this recipe. Plus, their meaty flavor is ideal for doctoring.

BACKYARD BARBECUE BEANS

Serves 12 to 16

Be sure to use a 13 by 9-inch metal baking pan; the volume of the beans is too great for a 13 by 9-inch ceramic baking dish, and it will overflow. We found that Bush's Original Recipe Baked Beans are the most consistent product for this recipe. Our favorite supermarket barbecue sauce is Bull's-Eye Original Barbecue Sauce.

- ½ cup barbecue sauce
- ½ cup ketchup
- ½ cup water
- 2 tablespoons spicy brown mustard
- 2 tablespoons cider vinegar
- 1 teaspoon liquid smoke
- 1 teaspoon granulated garlic
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- 1¼ pounds bratwurst, casings removed
- 2 onions, chopped
- 2 (28-ounce) cans baked beans
- 2 (15-ounce) cans pinto beans, drained
- 2 (15-ounce) cans cannellini beans, drained
- 1 (10-ounce) can Ro-tel Original Diced Tomatoes & Green Chilies, drained
- 6 slices thick-cut bacon, cut into 1-inch pieces

1. Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 350 degrees. Whisk barbecue sauce, ketchup, water, mustard, vinegar, liquid smoke, granulated garlic, and cayenne together in large bowl; set aside.

2. Cook bratwurst in 12 inch nonstick skillet over medium high heat, breaking up into small pieces with spoon, until fat begins to render, about 5 minutes. Stir in onions and cook until sausage and onions are well browned, about 15 minutes.

3. Transfer bratwurst mixture to bowl with sauce. Stir in baked beans, pinto beans, cannellini beans, and tomatoes. Transfer bean mixture to 13 by 9 inch baking pan and place pan on rimmed baking sheet. Arrange bacon pieces in single layer over top of beans.

4. Bake until beans are bubbling and bacon is rendered, about 1½ hours. Let cool for 15 minutes. Serve.

TO MAKE AHEAD

At end of step 3, beans can be wrapped in plastic and refrigerated for up to 24 hours. Proceed with recipe from step 4, increasing baking time to 1¾ hours.

Grilled Bourbon Steaks

Why marinate rib eyes in bourbon? We wondered, too—until we tried it.

BY ASHLEY MOORE

WHAT WOULD POSSESS the cooks at Jesse's Restaurant in Magnolia Springs, Alabama, to marinate perfectly good 16-ounce rib-eye steaks in bourbon whiskey, Worcestershire, and other "secret ingredients"? Aren't rib-eye steaks good enough on their own?

Answer: Yes, rib-eye steaks can be great with just salt. But the Whiskey Steak at Jesse's, which *Cook's Country* executive food editor Bryan Roof tried on a recent trip to Alabama, was something special, with a mild bourbon flavor that enhanced rather than detracted from its essential meatiness and created a lovely char as well. And judging by the fans who return to Jesse's again and again, he's hardly alone in his enthusiasm.

We've developed many recipes in the test kitchen that use a whiskey based marinade, including a popular recipe for Bourbon Smoked Chicken (August/September 2014), which I used as a starting point. The marinade is a mixture of bourbon, brown sugar, shallots, and garlic (these help add flavor to the exterior of the meat and increase the char), plus soy sauce, which has enough salt to season the meat throughout. Steaks made with this marinade were tasty, but they didn't remind Roof of Jesse's.

Roof approved of the garlic and shallots, but he felt that these steaks were too sweet, so I nixed the brown sugar. I also traded soy sauce for more complex Worcestershire sauce—which also contains enough salt to season the meat deeply. After several tests using whiskey and Worcestershire in varying ratios, tasters preferred a 1:1 partnership (1 cup of each for four steaks).

But which whiskey? In a side by side tasting of conventional whiskey versus bourbon (a subset of whiskey), tasters unanimously preferred the subtle caramel and vanilla flavors present in the bourbon. Why? The aging process of the booze. While most whiskey is aged in oak barrels, bourbon is aged in charred new white oak barrels for two to four years. This adds a distinct vanilla note to the bourbon, as well as a lovely chestnut-brown color. And because bourbon is made from a grain mixture that's at least 51 percent corn (see "World of Whiskey"), it has a subtle sweetness that offers a rounder, less harsh, less aggressively alcoholic presence.

A simple soak in bourbon, Worcestershire sauce, and seasonings amplifies this steak's sweet-savory flavors and adds extra char besides

My next task was to test marinating times. I found that 1 hour wasn't sufficient for substantive flavor; neither was 2 hours or even 3. Four hours was just right, although marinating for up to 24 hours worked well, too. Any more than that and the texture of the steaks suffered. Dividing the steaks and the marinade between two separate zipper-lock bags gave the best results—a deep, complex, but not overwhelming whiskey flavor that enhanced rather than overshadowed the meat.

As for a fire, an even, hot charcoal fire made with a full chimney of briquettes gave me an excellent char when the steaks were cooked to medium-rare. On a gas grill, setting all of the burners to high for a 15-minute preheat and then reducing the burners to medium-high for cooking was ideal.

With all the details settled, I ran through my refined recipe one last time. A few people walked by my grill and commented on how good "whatever that was" smelled. Just a few minutes later, I brought my nicely charred bourbon steaks into the kitchen for tasting, where even the most die-hard rib-eye purists were convinced. Bourbon goes beautifully with steak.

AMERICAN
• Bourbon is the most popular form of American whiskey
• It must contain at least 51 percent corn
• It must be aged in charred new oak barrels for two years
• Bourbon can't go into the barrel for aging at higher than a 62.5-percent alcohol level
IRISH
• Irish whiskey is made from a blend of malted barley (grain that's been germinated or sprouted which converts its starch to sugar) and unmalted barley
• It's aged in wood for a minimum of three years
• Often, it is triple-distilled so it's extra-smooth
CANADIAN
• Canadian whisky is typically made from a base whisky (usually a mix of grains but predominantly corn) and a flavoring whisky (often rye)
• Fifty-one percent of each batch must be aged in wood for three years
SCOTCH
• Single-malt scotches are made from malted barley
• Blends are made from a mix of single malt(s) and grain whisky made from various unmalted grains
• Scotch whisky is usually distilled twice and is aged in oak for three years

World of Whiskey

The word *whiskey* comes from the Celtic *uisqebaugh* (whis-kee-BAW), meaning "water of life." It is traditionally made from barley, corn, rye, wheat, or oats, but artisanal makers now incorporate everything from buckwheat to farro to spelt. A whiskey's distinct flavor is determined by a number of factors including the type of grain used, the aging time, the type of wood in which it is stored, and the distillation method. There are many types of whiskey, but American, Irish, Canadian, and Scotch are the most widely consumed. (Scotch and Canadian whiskys drop the *e*.)

GRILLED BOURBON STEAKS

Serves 6 to 8

Use a bourbon you'd be happy drinking. Plan ahead: These steaks need to marinate for at least 4 hours before grilling.

- **1 cup bourbon**
- **1 cup Worcestershire sauce**
- **1 shallot, minced**
- **2 garlic cloves, minced**
- **Kosher salt and pepper**
- **4 (1-pound) boneless rib-eye steaks, 1 to 1½ inches thick, trimmed**
- **2 tablespoons vegetable oil**

1. Whisk bourbon, Worcestershire, shallot, garlic, 2 teaspoons salt, and 2 teaspoons pepper together in bowl. Place 2 steaks in each of two 1 gallon zipper-lock bags and divide bourbon mixture between bags, about 1 cup each. Seal bags, turn to distribute marinade, and refrigerate for at least 4 hours or up to 24 hours, flipping occasionally.

2. Remove steaks from marinade and pat dry with paper towels; discard marinade. Brush steaks all over with oil and season liberally with salt and pepper.

3A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour evenly over grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

3B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Turn all burners to medium-high. (Adjust burners as needed to maintain grill temperature between 350 and 400 degrees.)

4. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place steaks on grill and cook (covered if using gas) until well charred and meat registers 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 6 to 8 minutes per side.

5. Transfer steaks to wire rack set in rimmed baking sheet, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 10 minutes. Serve.

What's the Best Worcestershire Sauce?

We use Worcestershire sauce to add salty, punchy kick and depth to all sorts of dishes. This ingredient originated in the English county of Worcester in the early 19th century. As the story goes, a wealthy Brit who had recently returned from India commissioned chemists John Lea and William Perrins to create a sauce reminiscent of those he'd enjoyed abroad. Lea and Perrins made the sauce to his specifications but found it unpalatable, so it sat, forgotten, in a corner of their shop's basement until someone decided to try it a few years later and discovered that fermentation had transformed it into a sauce with incredible depth.

While no manufacturer wants to give up its exact recipe, most Worcestershire sauce today is made with onions, garlic, salt, anchovies, vinegar, spices, tamarind, molasses, and sugar. The sauce is aged for a few weeks to a few months before being strained, diluted with water, and bottled. To find the best version, we sampled four nationally available products plain, in barbecue sauce, and in our recipe for Grilled Bourbon Steaks, which uses a full cup in the marinade.

Texture wasn't important in our findings, but flavor certainly was. Two manufacturers made their sauces vegan by omitting anchovies and substituting ingredients like onion oil, mushrooms, and soy sauce. Unfortunately, these sauces didn't quite match the subtle meatiness and depth of Worcestershire made with anchovies. Tasters also singled out one of the vegan sauces for its overly pungent notes of onion (from the addition of onion oil) when sampled plain and in the steak. We preferred sauces that were balanced, without any one ingredient being too assertive.

Vegan products also tried to compensate by jacking up the sodium: One sauce contained twice as much as our top-ranked sauce. Products with moderate saltiness allowed us better control over the final flavor of the dish. That said, these flaws of balance and salinity didn't matter when we tasted the sauces in barbecue sauce, a recipe that contains a lot of potent ingredients—if you need only a few teaspoons of Worcestershire for a pungent recipe, it's likely any product will do.

Overall, tasters preferred Lea & Perrins Original Worcestershire Sauce for its bright, balanced flavor; remarkable depth; and subtle kick of heat. It's no wonder this product has stuck around for almost 200 years. –LAUREN SAVOIE

RECOMMENDED

LEA & PERRINS Original Worcestershire Sauce
Price: $4.19 for 10 oz ($0.42 per oz)
Sodium: 65 mg
Ingredients: Distilled white vinegar, molasses, sugar, water, salt, onions, anchovies, garlic, cloves, tamarind extract, natural flavorings, chili pepper extract

TASTERS' NOTES: The original Worcestershire sauce, this product "hit all the marks," with "balanced" notes of vinegar, pepper, and tamarind. In a marinade, this sauce was "distinctively punchy" and lent a "bright" tanginess that tasters loved.

FRENCH'S Worcestershire Sauce
Price: $2.39 for 10 oz ($0.24 per oz)
Sodium: 65 mg
Ingredients: Distilled vinegar, water, molasses, corn syrup, salt, sugar, spices, caramel color, anchovies, natural flavors (soy), xanthan gum, dehydrated garlic powder, and tamarind extract

This sauce was full of "bold citrusy tang," with a "mild" sweetness and a hint of "fishy" flavor ("in a good way!"). Though a few tasters thought this sauce was "a little hot for Worcestershire," most appreciated its "spicy" heat and "balanced" flavors.

ANNIE'S Organic Vegan Worcestershire Sauce
Price: $3.59 for 6.25 oz ($0.57 per oz)
Sodium: 75 mg
Ingredients: Water, apple cider vinegar, molasses, soy sauce (water, soybean, salt, wheat alcohol), cane sugar, tamarind, sea salt, cornstarch, xanthan gum, garlic, onion, clove, chili pepper

Tasters liked the "hint of tang" and slightly "fruity" flavor of this organic sauce though, without anchovies, some lamented that this product was "more sweet" and "mild" than other samples. In steak marinade, this sauce was "molasses-forward," with subtle "smoky," "woodsy" notes.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

THE WIZARD'S Organic Vegan Worcestershire Sauce
Price: $4.09 for 8.5 oz ($0.48 per oz)
Sodium: 130 mg
Ingredients: Apple cider vinegar, molasses, wheat-free tamari (water, soybeans, salt), filtered water, evaporated cane juice, salt, lemon juice concentrate, ginger puree, tamarind, chili pepper, garlic powder, xanthan gum, shiitake mushrooms, allspice, cloves, orange extract, lemon extract, natural smoke flavor, natural onion flavor (onion oil)

While some tasters liked the "funky," "assertive" flavor of this "piquant" and "salty" sauce, many thought this vegan product "lacked the distinguishing flavors of Worcestershire." Instead, these tasters identified "heavy" notes of "salt" and "soy sauce," with a prominent "oniony" smell, likely from the addition of onion oil.

Sodium levels are for a 1 teaspoon serving.

Illustration: Lindsey Chandler

Summery Stuffed Peppers

Traditional stuffed peppers can be heavy, meat-filled meals. We wanted a fresher, lighter version for summertime. BY DIANE LNGER

IT S THE HEIGHT of summer, and I'm on the lookout for ideas for what to do with the bounty of bell peppers at the market. For years, my go to recipe has been my grandmother's meat and rice stuffed peppers. But I wanted something fresher, lighter, and easier.

To garner ideas, I gathered five intriguing stuffed pepper recipes and set out a grand tasting for my colleagues. One recipe, from celebrated California chef Alice Waters, featured peppers that were roasted, peeled, and stuffed with crusty bread, creamy sheep's milk cheese, fresh herbs, lemon zest, and pine nuts. I liked the bright flavors but wanted to simplify the process and use less expensive alternatives to the pricey pine nuts and sheep's milk cheese.

Armed with inspiration, I cut the tops off six peppers and seeded them. I set them cut side down in an oiled baking pan, brushed them with extra virgin olive oil, and roasted them (along with the stemmed pepper tops, which I'd chop and add to the filling later) in a 475 degree oven until they began to blister and soften, which took about 20 minutes. After standing them upright to cool, I turned my focus to the filling

I cut a small baguette (about 7 ounces) into ½ inch pieces and toasted them in a nonstick skillet with ¼ cup of olive oil. After removing the bread, I added a little more oil to the skillet with some garlic and red pepper flakes and cooked the mixture briefly I then tossed this with the bread.

I chopped the roasted pepper tops and minced plenty of fresh parsley and basil to toss with the toasted bread. I swapped out sheep's milk cheese in favor of easy to find goat cheese—6 ounces was enough to add a creamy, tangy element without overpowering things.

For a bit of substance, I added a can of chickpeas, their nutty flavor comple mented the mixture, and mashing them helped hold the stuffing together.

Some lemon zest and juice added freshness, a few capers contributed savory depth, and some sliced scallions provided a nuanced but pungent punch. After about 15 minutes in the oven, I had a lovely summery dish.

Chickpeas help bulk up this summery vegetarian dish, elevating it from a side to a light supper.

STUFFED PEPPERS WITH CHICKPEAS, GOAT CHEESE, AND HERBS Serves 6

Laura Chenel's Chèvre Fresh Chèvre Log is our favorite goat cheese. Note that we bake the peppers in a metal baking pan, not a ceramic baking dish; the metal pan gets hotter

- ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 6 (7- to 8-ounce) bell peppers
- Salt and pepper
- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed
- 7 ounces baguette, cut into ½-inch pieces (4 cups)
- 8 garlic cloves, minced
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- 8 scallions, sliced
- ¼ cup minced fresh parsley
- ¼ cup minced fresh basil
- 3 tablespoons capers, chopped
- 1 tablespoon grated lemon zest plus 1 tablespoon juice
- 6 ounces goat cheese, crumbled (1½ cups)

1. Adjust oven rack to upper middle position and heat oven to 475 degrees. Grease 13 by 9 inch metal baking pan with 1 tablespoon oil. Cut off top ½ inch of bell peppers and reserve; discard stems and seeds. Arrange bell peppers and their tops cut side down in prepared pan. Brush bell peppers and tops with 1 tablespoon oil, then season with salt and pepper

2. Roast until bell peppers are soft ened and beginning to blister, about 20 minutes. Flip bell peppers cut side up and let sit until cool enough to handle, about 5 minutes. Season insides with salt and pepper. Adjust oven temperature to 350 degrees.

3. Using potato masher, mash chick peas coarse in large bowl. Chop bell pepper tops into ¼ inch pieces and add to bowl with chickpeas.

4. Heat ¼ cup oil in 12 inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shim mering. Add bread and cook, stirring occasionally, until light golden brown and crispy, 5 to 7 minutes. Push bread to 1 side of skillet and add remaining 2 tablespoons oil to empty spot. Add garlic and pepper flakes to oil and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir garlic mixture and ½ teaspoon salt into bread to combine. Transfer to bowl with chickpea mixture; let cool completely, about 10 minutes

5. Stir scallions, parsley, basil, capers, lemon zest and juice, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper into chickpea mixture. Gently fold in goat cheese until combined

6. Divide filling evenly among bell peppers, mounding slightly. Bake until filling registers between 100 and 120 degrees and begins to brown on top, 15 to 20 minutes. Transfer to platter and drizzle with extra oil. Serve

Alice Waters, Culinary Pioneer

Alice Waters's early food memories 'nvolve tomatoes, rhubarb, and asparagus, all from a backyard "victory garden" kept by her mother Such gardens were planted during World Wars I and I and produced as much as 40 percent of the vegetables consumed in the U S some years. Fast-forward to 1965 when Waters spent her junior year in France and her passion for fresh ingredients surged Returning to the States and unable to find favorites from abroad such as radishes or sorrel, she opened her now-legendary restaurant, Chez Panisse, with a vision of serving fresh, seasona , and local ngredients.–REBECCA HAYS

Photo: Left, James Ransom

Fried Red Tomatoes

What? Everybody knows it's fried *green* tomatoes, right? Not at this whistle-stop.

BY D ANE LNGER

FRIED GREEN TOMATOES may be the stuff movies are made of, but red, ripe tomatoes deserve a shot at fame, too. But simply swapping red tomatoes into our existing recipe for Fried Green Tomatoes was a total disas ter. The coating barely adhered to the tomato slices, leaving me with a steamy, wet mess. It was time to reengineer this recipe for the sweeter, richer red tomato.

I auditioned several varieties of toma toes: beefsteak, vine ripened, heirloom, and plum. After many a soggy test, I found that plum tomatoes' compact size and dense flesh made them the ideal choice, as they stayed relatively firm. But they still had too much moisture.

To coax out this excess water, I tried salting them (an old test kitchen trick). It backfired, leaving the tomato flesh mealy. Simply letting the slices sit on paper towels for about 40 minutes worked better. Now for the breading.

I knew I'd need a sticky layer first; after several tests, I settled on ⅓ cup of buttermilk mixed with 1 beaten egg.

From there, I turned to the dry coat ing. Cornmeal on its own was too gritty and formed a hard, cardboard like sheet. Cutting it with all purpose flour did the trick. Adding granulated garlic to the drying tomatoes before coating them boosted flavor, as did some grated Par mesan cheese added to the coating mix. Shallow fried in hot oil until crunchy on both sides but still tender in the middle, my fried red tomatoes were sure to make the cut.

FRIED RED TOMATOES Serves 4

Use two forks to turn the tomatoes quickly. This recipe can easily be doubled and cooked in two batches; change the oil and wipe out the skillet between batches.

- 8 ounces plum tomatoes, ends trimmed, sliced ¼ inch thick
- ½ teaspoon granulated garlic
- ⅓ cup buttermilk
- 1 large egg
- ⅔ cup cornmeal
- ⅓ cup all-purpose flour
- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup)
- Salt and pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 2 tablespoons minced fresh basil
- Lemon wedges

1. Line wire rack with triple layer of paper towels. Evenly space tomato slices on rack, sprinkle with granulated garlic, and let drain for 40 minutes, flipping halfway through draining.

2. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Whisk buttermilk and egg together in shallow dish. Combine cornmeal, flour, Parmesan, ¾ teaspoon salt, ¼ teaspoon pepper, and cayenne in second shallow dish. Lightly pat tops of tomatoes with paper towels to remove any accumulated liquid. Working with one at a time, dip tomato slices in but termilk mixture, then dredge in corn meal mixture, pressing firmly to adhere, transfer to prepared sheet.

3. Heat oil in 12 inch nonstick skillet over medium high heat until just smok ing. Add all tomato slices to skillet and fry until golden brown, 2 to 4 minutes per side. Transfer to platter and sprinkle with basil. Serve with lemon wedges.

A light cornmeal-and-Parmesan-cheese coating gives these flavorful slices a satisfying crunch.

DON'T MAKE TH S MISTAKE

Using the Wrong Tomato

The juicy flesh of beefsteak, heirloom, and vine-ripened tomatoes is so full of moisture that no amount of pretreatment can adequately dry it out for frying. These varieties also contain lots of watery, seedy jelly that prevents a coating from prop erly adhering and frying up crunchy.

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

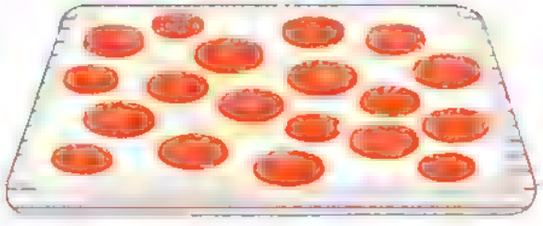
KEYS TO **Firm, Crunchy Fried Red Tomatoes**

Use Plum Tomatoes

More meaty and less watery than other options, plum tomatoes stay relatively firm once coated and fried.

Eliminate Excess Moisture

Evenly space the tomato slices on a paper towel–lined wire rack, and let them drain for 40 minutes.



Double Dip

For a crunchy coating that doesn't slough off, coat the slices with an egg-and-buttermilk "glue" before dredging them in a mix of cornmeal, flour, Parmesan, and seasonings.

Citrus-Braised Pork Tacos

Traditional *cochinita pibil* takes two days and visits to three specialty stores. Unbelievably good, yes, but there had to be an easier way. BY MORGAN BOLING

COCHINITA PIBIL, THE inspiration for our Citrus Braised Pork Tacos, is a Mexican dish traditionally made by coating a whole suckling pig in the juice from bitter oranges and a blend of warm spices. It marinates overnight before being swaddled in banana leaves and slowly pit roasted. The banana leaves impart a mild herby flavor while helping insulate the meat and keep it moist. The result is succulent, multifaceted, and richly flavored. But it's hardly easy to achieve. To make a version suitable for cooking at home, I would have to adjust. A lot. But would I have to compromise?

Figuring out what cut of meat to use would be my first task. Suckling pig is incredibly rich in collagen, which, when cooked, yields delicate, tender meat. Extensive research into existing recipes showed a range of options, from pork ribs to pork loin to pork butt. To be thorough, I cooked through several of these recipes using different cuts of meat and found that pork butt was the way to go. Its rich marbling mimicked suckling pig's ability to become ultratender during a long stint over low heat.

The ingredient that stood out as most problematic for home cooks was, of course, banana leaves. Though we've found substitutions in the past—in our recipe for Kalua Pork (August/September 2011), we substituted green tea for banana leaves—I wasn't sure how critical the leaves would be here. To find out, I ordered some banana leaves and ran a test, bundling one pork butt in the leaves and leaving the other unbundled. Only a few tasters were able to pick up on the aromatic flavor they added, and we saw very little difference in the moisture level. Less authentic, yes. But given the leaves' minor flavor contribution and the difficulty of obtaining them, it was a cut worth making.

My next task was to assemble a cooking liquid that would mimic the traditional cochinita pibil. Garlic was a given, providing a savory flavor base. Cinnamon, cumin, and pepper lent warm spiciness. A teaspoon of oregano and annatto, a spice popular in Mexican cuisine and not always easy to find in the States (more on that in a moment), contributed earthiness. I added orange juice concentrate (more reliable and consistent than orange juice), flavorful tomato paste, and enough water to keep the meat moist while braising.

Our slightly sweet, superspicy habanero sauce gets its vibrant orange color from an unexpected ingredient: carrot.

Testing revealed that 2 hours, uncovered, in a 300 degree oven (more controlled than the stove) turned the pork into the luscious, fall apart meat I was after. Shredding by hand and with two forks worked, but mashing the slow-cooked meat with a potato masher got the job done three times as fast.

Back to the annatto. The most common culinary use for annatto in the United States is coloring. In amounts small enough to be undetectable to most tasters, the vibrantly red spice is used to impart an orange color in products from cheddar cheese to breakfast cereals. In Mexican cuisine, however, larger doses of the mild spice offer an herbal, faintly bitter flavor. While we enjoyed the complexity and rusty color the annatto was giving the pork, it's not available in most grocery stores.

I tried a batch without annatto, instead browning the tomato paste. This solved the color issue, but I missed the flavor. A coworker suggested bay leaves, and she was right. Five bay leaves added a subtle, earthy note that balanced the dish. And a small amount of Worcestershire sauce closed the loop with a meaty, bitter boost.

To assemble my tacos, I put together a dish of quickly pickled red onions and a fiery, bright orange habanero sauce based, in the traditional way, on cooked carrots for structure and sweetness. These tacos were the most popular dish in the test kitchen that week.

Top, Armando De La Torre Jr inspects a case of *chicharrones* Bottom left, a Guisados employee hand-pats fresh tortillas. Bottom right, one of many *guisados* (stews) bubbling away in the kitchen

Tracking Tacos in East Los Angeles

In 2010, when Armando De La Torre Sr. turned 50 and decided to open a restaurant, he reached back to the comfort food of his youth, the *guisados* (stews and braises) that his mother used to make. "Growing up we didn't come home to carne asada. Like many Mexican families we ate guisados—*tinga*, *calabacitas*, *picado*—with beans and tortillas. One-pot meals. I remember sneaking into the kitchen, and my mom would be yelling that it wasn't ready, but I'd run in, grab a tortilla, and make a taco out of whatever she was cooking. That's how I enjoyed her food."

Scores of brightly colored signs hang above the storefronts and restaurants that pack Cesar Chavez Avenue in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of East Los Angeles. The vibe on the avenue is mildly gritty yet a little tender, and the smiles I encounter are genuinely warm. A few steps inside Guisados, I stop at the counter to take in the large chalkboard menu that climbs to the ceiling, pitchers of aguas frescas sit next to the register. I'm mesmerized by a woman hand-patting tortillas from a bowl of fresh masa and slapping them onto the hot griddle. She moves quickly and flips the hot tortillas with her bare hands. I order several tacos and finish up just as Armando and his son, Armando Jr., arrive to greet me.

We head outside around the back of the building, step down through a low door, and make our way up a flight of stairs to the Guisados prep kitchen. There's a blur of shuffling bodies and bubbling pots, and the aroma of chiles and cumin hangs thick in the air. Armando Sr. dips a spoon into a guisado, scooping the chile-laced oil slick on top, and offers up a taste of the meat and pepper combination from its lower depths. Again, I'm mesmerized. –BRYAN ROOF

CITRUS-BRAISED PORK TACOS

Serves 6

Pork butt roast is often labeled Boston butt in the supermarket. For a spicier sauce, add an extra habanero or two; if you are spice-averse, substitute less-spicy jalapeños for the habaneros.

PORK

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon ground cumin
- 1 teaspoon dried oregano
- ½ teaspoon ground allspice
- ½ teaspoon ground cinnamon
- ⅓ cup tomato paste
- 1½ cups water
- ¼ cup frozen orange juice concentrate, thawed
- 3 tablespoons distilled white vinegar
- 1½ tablespoons Worcestershire sauce
- 5 bay leaves
- Salt and pepper
- 1 (2½- to 3-pound) boneless pork butt roast, trimmed and cut into 1-inch chunks

PICKLED RED ONIONS

- 1 red onion, halved and sliced thin
- 1 cup distilled white vinegar
- ⅓ cup sugar
- ¼ teaspoon salt

HABANERO SAUCE

- 1 cup water
- 1 carrot, peeled and chopped
- 1 vine-ripened tomato, cored and chopped
- ¼ cup chopped onion
- ½ habanero chile, stemmed
- 1 garlic clove, smashed and peeled
- Salt and pepper
- 1 tablespoon distilled white vinegar
- 1½ teaspoons lime juice, plus lime wedges for serving

- 18 (6-inch) corn tortillas, warmed

1. FOR THE PORK: Adjust oven rack to lower-middle position and heat oven to 300 degrees. Heat oil in Dutch oven over medium heat until shimmering. Add onion and cook until lightly browned, 4 to 6 minutes.

2. Add garlic, cumin, oregano, allspice, and cinnamon and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomato paste and cook, stirring constantly, until paste begins to darken, about 45 seconds. Stir in water, orange juice concentrate, 2 tablespoons vinegar, Worcestershire, bay leaves, 2 teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper, scraping up any browned bits.

3. Add pork and bring to boil. Transfer to oven, uncovered, and cook until pork is tender, about 2 hours, stirring once halfway through cooking.

4. FOR THE PICKLED RED ONIONS: Meanwhile, place onion in medium bowl. Bring vinegar, sugar, and salt to simmer in small saucepan over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally, until sugar dissolves. Pour over onions and cover loosely. Let onions cool completely, about 30 minutes. (Onions can be refrigerated for up to 1 week.)

5. FOR THE HABANERO SAUCE

Combine water, carrot, tomato, onion, habanero, garlic, and ½ teaspoon salt in now-empty saucepan. Bring to boil over medium-heat and cook until carrot is tender, about 10 minutes. Remove from heat and let carrot mixture cool slightly, about 5 minutes. Transfer carrot mixture to blender, add vinegar and lime juice, and process until sauce is smooth, 1 to 2 minutes. Season with salt and pepper to taste; set aside. (Sauce can be refrigerated for up to 1 week.)

6. Transfer pot to stovetop, discard bay leaves. Using potato masher, mash pork until finely shredded. Bring to simmer over medium-high heat, then reduce heat to medium-low and cook until most of liquid has evaporated, 3 to 5 minutes.

7. Off heat, stir in remaining 1 tablespoon vinegar and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve on tortillas with pickled red onions, habanero sauce, and lime wedges.

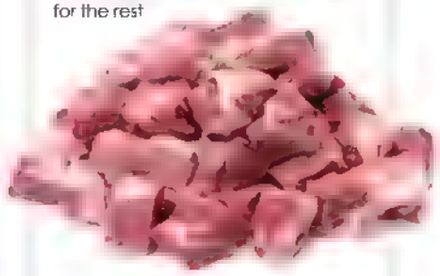
TEST KITCHEN TIP

Safely Handling Habaneros

Take our word for it: Don't hand a habaneros with your bare hands. The capsaicin levels are so high that they can irritate your skin (or worse, your eyes). To protect yourself, wear disposable latex gloves. In a pinch, zipper-lock bags can serve as makeshift gloves.

Translating Cochinita Pibil

Authentic *cochinita pibil* is full of hard-to-source ingredients, including a tender whole suckling pig, fragrant banana leaves for wrapping the pork during cooking, and annatto (pebble-like seeds that contribute color and a mild herbal flavor). We skipped the banana leaves since the flavor contribution is negligible, swapping in substitutes for the rest.



PORK BUTT
Well-marbled, collagen-rich pork is nearly as succulent and tender as suckling pig.

BAY LEAVES
These provide an herbal aroma that's similar to that of annatto.

TOMATO PASTE
Concentrated tomato paste adds saturated color, just as annatto does.

Photos: Top: Steve Klise

Getting to Know Tomato Products

These versatile pantry items take many shapes and forms. Here's a sampling of the ones we use most often.

BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

Whole Peeled Tomatoes

CLOSEST TO FRESH

We reach for whole peeled tomatoes when making soups, marinara, or Sunday gravy. Their sweet flavor is the closest to that of in-season tomatoes, and they're peeled, so they're extraconvenient. We reach for our taste-test winner, Muir Glen Organic Whole Peeled Tomatoes, when making our Tomato Casserole (**CooksCountry.com/tomatocasserole**)

Canned Diced Tomatoes

PANTRY STAPLE

Good canned diced tomatoes have a fresh flavor and firm texture that make them one of our top pantry items. Most products are treated with calcium chloride (for a firm texture), salt, and citric acid (for flavor). Try our favorite, Hunt's Diced Tomatoes, in our recipe for One-Minute Tomato Salsa (**CooksCountry.com/oneminutesalsa**)

Fire-Roasted Tomatoes

BRING THE SMOKE

Fire-roasted tomatoes have a sweet, smoky flavor (some are actually charred, others simply smoke-flavored) that adds complexity to a wide range of dishes—from pasta sauces to chilis and stews. We've found that the smoke level varies widely from product to product and that it mellows with longer cooking. We like the "warm, intense" flavor of Delallo Fire-Roasted Diced Tomatoes

Tomato Paste

INTENSE CONCENTRATION

Packed with savory-tasting glutamates, tomato paste adds meaty depth, sweetness, and richness to dishes like our Meatballs and Marinara (**CooksCountry.com/meatballsmarinara**). This thick paste is made by cooking skinned, seeded tomatoes until most of their water has evaporated. Our taste-test winner is "bright," "robust" Goya

Crushed Tomatoes

TEXTURAL ENIGMA

With no U.S. Food and Drug Administration oversight to regulate consistency, crushed tomato products differ greatly—from thick and saucy to chunky and full of seeds. We prefer our crushed tomatoes chunky—not thick like tomato paste or smooth like tomato sauce. Our favorite is Tuttorosso Crushed Tomatoes in Thick Puree with Basil

Ketchup

A FRIEND TO FRIES

Supermarket tomato ketchup is sweet, salty and boldly seasoned with onions, garlic, cloves cinnamon, allspice, and vinegar. Its thick body and intense flavor make it a powerful ingredient in recipes like cocktail and barbecue sauces, baked beans, meatloaf, and our Sweet-and-Sour Chicken (see page 19). Heinz Organic Tomato Ketchup is our taste-test winner

Tomato Salsa

NOT JUST FOR DIPPING

You'll find many jarred salsas at the market. You'll also find that the fresh flavors and textures of tomatoes, onion, chiles, and cilantro are missing from most products. In a recent tasting of jarred salsas, we found that Chi-Chi's Medium Thick and Chunky Salsa was "spicy, fresh, and tomatoey" with "pleasant, not overpowering" heat. We use jarred salsa in our recipe for Pan-Seared Chicken with Spicy Pinto Beans (**CooksCountry.com/chickenwithspicybeans**).

Sun-Dried Tomatoes

SHRIVELED GOODNESS

Sun-dried plum tomatoes are valued for their chewy texture and concentrated flavor. Most products are imported from Italy or Turkey and are sold either dry-packed in plastic containers or bags or oil-packed in jars. We prefer oil-packed, the dry-packed variety is often leathery. Try them in our Chicken Baked in Foil with Fennel and Sun-Dried Tomatoes (**CooksCountry.com/sundriedtomatochicken**)

Tomato Puree

SEEDLESS STEWER

Canned tomato puree is fully cooked and strained. It has a thick, even texture that is especially well suited for long-cooked dishes like stews and ragus. We combine tomato puree with diced tomatoes for a blend of textures in our recipe for Slow-Cooker Weeknight Chili (**CooksCountry.com/slowcookerchili**). Our favorite is Muir Glen Organic Tomato Puree

Tomato Sauce

SEASONED SUPPORTER

Canned tomato sauce is typically tomato paste thinned with water and usually seasoned with garlic and onion. We often use it in combination with other tomato products; a mix of tomato sauce and diced tomatoes creates a sauce with the perfect flavor and texture in our recipe for One-Pot Baked Ziti with Sausage and Spinach (**CooksCountry.com/onepotbakedziti**)

Tomato Juice

BREAKFAST STANDBY

Tomato juice's utility goes far beyond breakfast and Bloody Marys. Use it in place of water or broth in soups, stews, or pan sauces for richer flavor. We love the intensity it brings to our easy Gazpacho (**CooksCountry.com/gazpacho**). Campbell's makes our favorite tomato juice; our tasters praised its "thick, but not too thick" texture and "sweet, bright" tomato flavor

Cocktail Sauce

POTENT STUFF

This spicy, nose-tingling sauce is a must with shrimp cocktail and raw oysters. Most versions are a combination of ketchup, prepared horseradish, lemon juice, and seasonings; some include Worcestershire, hot sauce, or tomato-based chili sauce. Homemade trumps store-bought—see for yourself with our recipe for Shrimp Cocktail (**CooksCountry.com/shrimpcocktail**)

Quick Strawberry Jam

Fresh strawberry jam that doesn't take all day and doesn't taste like syrup? Yes, please.

BY LEAH COLINS

STRAWBERRY JAM ADDS fresh, fruity flavor and color to breakfasts, snacks, and desserts, but too often, store-bought varieties can be sticky and cloyingly sweet, tasting more like sugar or corn syrup than strawberries. I wanted a bright homemade jam that tasted like strawberries and didn't take all day or require a battery of canning equipment to make.

Turning fresh berries into a thick jam involves three key components (besides the berries, of course): pectin, acid (in this case, lemon juice), and sugar. Pectin is a natural substance found in varying amounts in fruits and vegetables; when combined with acid, sugar, and heat, the pectin sets into a gel, suspending the fruit in a spreadable jam. Strawberries have some natural pectin but not quite enough. I did some early tests with store-bought pectin but was left with tacky, gloppy results.

Drawing on long-standing test kitchen knowledge, I shredded and added a large Granny Smith apple, which had just enough pectin to help the jam gel and also contributed a welcome tartness without any discernible apple flavor. Two tablespoons of acidic lemon juice helped activate the pectin and amplified the flavor, too.

As sweet as strawberries can be, jam needs sugar. After playing with various amounts, I settled on 3 cups of granulated sugar. This was enough to sweeten the jam and help the pectin gel while not overshadowing the strawberry flavor.

Cooking ingredients into a jam requires a bit of focus and faith. I learned to stay at attention: I found that I had to stir every couple of minutes during the 20- to 25-minute boiling time to keep the frothy mixture from boiling over (especially during the first few minutes of cooking) and to ensure even cooking. An instant-read thermometer made it easy to keep tabs on the mixture; once it registered between 217 and 220 degrees, I removed the pot from the heat. I performed a quick test—I dabbed a spoonful of jam on a chilled plate and put it in the freezer. After a couple of minutes, I dragged my finger through it to see if I left a trail. This gave me a sense of its jamminess; if the jam runs back into the line on the plate, it needs another minute or two on the heat.

Just four basic ingredients produce a thick, spreadable summertime jam.

Just for certainty's sake, I tested this recipe with subpar berries and can now confirm the least surprising thing about this recipe: Fresh berries produce the best jam. Be sure to choose small, fragrant berries that are just ripe, and discard any that are heavily bruised. If possible, use the fruit the same day you bring it home; overly ripe fruit will give you mushy, not gelled, jam. In addition, it won't taste as fresh and delicious as jam made with fresh berries.

Bonus: There's no need to process and can this strawberry jam. It lasts for two months in a tightly covered container in the refrigerator.

CLASSIC STRAWBERRY JAM

Makes 4 cups

Be sure to choose small, fragrant berries that are just ripe, and discard any that are bruised or mushy. Do not try to make a double batch of this jam in a large pot; rather, make two single batches in separate pots. Shred the apple on the large holes of a box grater.

- **3 pounds strawberries, hulled and cut into ½-inch pieces (10 cups)**
- **3 cups (21 ounces) sugar**
- **1 large Granny Smith apple, peeled and shredded (1¼ cups)**
- **2 tablespoons lemon juice**

1. Place 2 small plates in freezer to chill. Using potato masher, crush strawberries in Dutch oven until fruit is mostly broken down. Stir in sugar, apple, and lemon juice.

2. Bring to boil over medium-high heat, stirring to ensure sugar is completely dissolved. Continue to boil mixture, stirring and adjusting heat as needed, until thickened and registering 217 to 220 degrees, 20 to 25 minutes. (Jam is very frothy in beginning and requires near-constant stirring to prevent it from boiling over; froth will subside as jam boils.) Remove pot from heat.

3. To test consistency, place 1 teaspoon jam on chilled plate and freeze for 2 minutes. Drag your finger through jam on plate; jam has correct consistency when your finger leaves distinct trail. If jam is runny, return pot to heat and simmer for 1 to 3 minutes longer before retesting. Skim any foam from surface of jam using spoon.

4. Let jam cool completely, about 2 hours. Transfer jam to airtight container and refrigerate until set, 12 to 24 hours. (Jam can be refrigerated for up to 2 months.)

SECRET INGREDIENT

Granny Smith Apple

There's no need to buy commercial pectin: A shredded Granny Smith apple contains just enough natural pectin to help the jam gel.

TEST KITCHEN TECHNIQUE

Consistency Test

Place 1 teaspoon of jam on a chilled plate, freeze it for 2 minutes, and then drag your finger through it. If your finger leaves a distinct trail, the jam is ready. If the trail is blurred, return the pot to the heat and simmer the jam for 1 to 3 minutes longer before retesting.

Roasted Corn and Poblano Chowder

A few simple tricks help us coax satisfying flavor from sweet fresh corn and spicy poblano chiles.

BY ASHLEY MOORE

"WE JUST DON'T taste the corn," my tasters said. "Or the poblanos." I was ready to throw in the towel. I had cooked a dozen batches of corn and poblano chowder using every trick I could think of, but the sweet flavor of the corn and the slightly spicy, earthy taste of the poblano chiles weren't coming through.

I was in search of a creamy, silky soup full of these contrasting flavors, shucking ears of corn to roast until browned alongside poblanos before stirring them into a soup—to lackluster results. No matter what I tried, the vegetables always turned soft, steamy, and flat.

I set to tinkering, and my first adjustment was promising: I switched from roasting to broiling. After stripping the corn kernels from the cob, I tossed them with oil, salt, and pepper; spread them over a baking sheet with halved poblanos on the side; and set the whole thing to broil. In just 10 minutes, I had beautiful charred vegetables.

Meanwhile, I sautéed some onion and garlic in a Dutch oven, poured in chicken broth, and then added the corn and poblanos along with some cut-up red potatoes. After 15 minutes of simmering, the potatoes were tender.

Things were finally moving in the right direction, but the chowder's flavor was still a bit flat. Bring on the bacon: I rendered some in the pot, using its fat to cook the onion and garlic before adding the other ingredients.

To add some body, I whirred a few ladles of the simmered soup in the blender and stirred this puree back into the pot. This helped, but the color was murky. For my next try, I kept the roasted poblanos out of the soup until the end, adding them to warm through when the soup was done. This soup had a better color, but even with a bit of half and half, it needed more thickness.

I considered a trick I'd seen in a few recipes: adding ground masa (corn flour) to the chowder for deeper corn flavor and some thickening. But I didn't want to hunt down a specialty ingredient, so I used a substitute that was just as flavorful and easier to find—corn tortillas. I tore a couple of tortillas into pieces and added them to the blender. The mixture was decidedly thicker, with even stronger corn flavor. Some fresh chopped cilantro and a few squirts of lime juice added a final flourish.

ROASTED CORN AND POBLANO CHOWDER Serves 6 to 8

Don't substitute frozen corn for fresh. Because it is parcooked, frozen corn won't release the starchy liquid that flavors and thickens the soup. In addition to the usual garnishes, you can serve the chowder with our Fried Corn Tortilla Pieces (recipe follows), if desired.

- 2 poblano chiles, stemmed, halved lengthwise, and seeded
- 1 tablespoon vegetable oil
- 6 ears corn, kernels cut from cobs (5¼ cups)
- Salt and pepper
- 4 slices bacon, chopped fine
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 7 cups chicken broth
- 1 pound red potatoes, unpeeled, cut into ½-inch chunks
- ¼ cup half-and-half
- 2 (6-inch) corn tortillas, torn into 1-inch pieces
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh cilantro, plus leaves for serving
- 1 tablespoon lime juice, plus lime wedges for serving
- Sour cream
- Crumbled queso fresco

1. Adjust oven rack 6 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Line rimmed baking sheet with aluminum foil. Toss poblanos with 1 teaspoon oil in bowl. Arrange poblanos cut side down in single column flush against short side of sheet.

2. Toss corn, remaining 2 teaspoons oil, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in now empty bowl. Spread corn in even layer on remaining portion of sheet next to poblanos. Broil until poblanos are mostly blackened and corn is well browned and tender, 10 to 15 minutes, flipping poblanos and stirring corn halfway through broiling.

3. Place poblanos in bowl, cover with plastic wrap, and let cool for 5 minutes. Remove skins and chop poblanos into ½-inch pieces; transfer to clean bowl and set aside.

4. Meanwhile, cook bacon in Dutch oven over medium heat until crispy, 5 to 7 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer bacon to paper towel–lined plate. Add onion and ¼ teaspoon salt to fat left in pot and cook until onion is softened and beginning to brown, 5 to 7 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

5. Add broth, potatoes, browned corn, and ½ teaspoon salt to Dutch oven and bring to simmer, scraping up any browned bits. Cook at vigorous simmer until potatoes are tender, 15 to 20 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in half and half.

6. Transfer 2 cups chowder to blender. Add tortillas and process until smooth, about 1 minute. Return pureed chowder to pot and stir in chopped poblanos. Return to medium heat and bring to simmer. Stir in minced cilantro, lime juice, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ¾ teaspoon pepper. Serve, passing bacon, cilantro leaves, lime wedges, sour cream, and queso fresco separately.

Bright garnishes like cilantro and lime invigorate this deeply satisfying soup

FRIED CORN TORTILLA PIECES

Makes about 1 cup

These fried pieces of tortilla make an excellent crispy accompaniment to soups and chowders, including our Roasted Corn and Poblano Chowder.

- ¾ cup vegetable oil
- 4 (6-inch) corn tortillas, cut into ½-inch pieces
- Salt

Heat oil in 10-inch skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Add tortillas and cook, stirring occasionally, until golden brown, 3 to 5 minutes. Using slotted spoon, transfer tortillas to paper towel–lined plate. Sprinkle with salt and let cool slightly to crisp.

Sweet-and-Sour Chicken

Puffy chicken fingers smothered in a way-too-sweet sauce? No thanks. This go-to takeout dish from my childhood needed an update. BY DIANE UNGER

SWEET-AND-SOUR CHICKEN IS a mainstay of American Chinese restaurants. It can be great, but often the sauce is cloying and the chicken squishy. I set out to rescue it by creating crispy chicken in a light sauce.

I gathered several existing recipes and made five of them to help set my course. Most were awful. But I learned a few things: One, chicken fried at 375 degrees was superior to chicken fried at 350. Two, marinating was unnecessary; any flavor gained was lost once the chicken was sauced. Three, a complex and refined sauce was possible.

The trickiest piece of the puzzle was the batter. After many attempts, I settled on a version that uses a mix of flour and cornstarch and, surprisingly, no egg, which I found weighed down the batter. Instead, I added 3 tablespoons of oil and 1¼ cups of water. Our science editor explained that the oil coated the flour and cornstarch particles, preventing them from being wetted by the water and sticking together to allow for a light, airy coating.

For the sauce, I kept it simple: I simmered equal parts water, orange juice, pineapple juice, white vinegar (for the sour component), and sugar along with 3 tablespoons of ketchup and some red pepper flakes. I thickened the sauce with a slurry of cornstarch and water—just enough to help it cling. Some bell peppers and scallions, quickly fried in the same oil, finished the dish.

SWEET-AND-SOUR CHICKEN

Serves 4

Use a Dutch oven that holds 6 quarts or more for this recipe. Be sure to turn off the heat before frying the vegetables; the residual heat is enough to cook them through. Serve with rice.

SAUCE

- ½ cup pineapple juice
- ½ cup orange juice
- ½ cup distilled white vinegar
- ½ cup sugar
- 3 tablespoons ketchup
- ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes
- ⅛ teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon cornstarch

CHICKEN

- 1 pound boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed and cut crosswise on slight bias into ½-inch-wide strips
- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup (5 ounces) all-purpose flour
- 1 cup (4 ounces) cornstarch
- 2 teaspoons baking powder
- ½ teaspoon baking soda
- 1¼ cups water
- 3 tablespoons plus 2 quarts peanut or vegetable oil
- 2 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and cut into 1-inch pieces
- 6 scallions, cut into 1-inch pieces

Cornstarch helps our sauce cling to the chicken without sogging out the coating.

1. **FOR THE SAUCE:** Combine pineapple juice, orange juice, vinegar, ½ cup water, sugar, ketchup, pepper flakes, and salt in medium saucepan and bring to boil over medium high heat. Reduce heat to medium and simmer until reduced to 1½ cups, 8 to 10 minutes. Dissolve cornstarch in 1 tablespoon cold water, whisk into sauce, and cook until thickened, about 1 minute. Transfer sauce to 2-cup liquid measuring cup; set aside.

2. **FOR THE CHICKEN:** Set wire rack in rimmed baking sheet and line half of rack with triple layer of paper towels. Line large plate with triple layer of paper towels. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper.

3. Whisk flour, cornstarch, baking powder, baking soda, 2 teaspoons salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper together in large bowl. Whisk in water and 3 tablespoons oil until smooth. Submerge half of chicken in batter, stirring to thoroughly coat.

4. Add remaining 2 quarts oil to large Dutch oven until it measures about 1½ inches deep and heat over medium high heat to 375 degrees. Working quickly, with 1 piece of chicken at a time, use fork to spear chicken in batter and carefully drop into hot oil. (Use second fork to help release chicken into oil.) Adjust burner, if necessary, to maintain oil temperature between 350 and 375 degrees.

5. Fry, stirring gently to prevent pieces from sticking together, until chicken is golden and cooked through, 2 to 3 minutes. Transfer chicken to paper towel–lined side of prepared rack. Let drain for 30 seconds, then move to unlined side of rack. Return oil to 375 degrees, submerge remaining chicken in remaining batter, and repeat frying with remaining chicken.

6. Turn off heat, add bell peppers to oil, and fry, stirring constantly, until softened, about 1 minute. Transfer to prepared plate. Add scallions to oil and fry until tender, about 5 seconds. Transfer to plate with peppers. Blot vegetables with paper towels to remove excess oil.

7. Microwave sauce until hot, about 1 minute. Gently toss chicken, bell peppers, scallions, and 1 cup sauce in large bowl to combine; transfer to platter. Serve immediately, passing remaining sauce separately.

The American Table
Sourcing Sweet and Sour

The concept of sweet-and-sour anything (protein cloaked in the namesake sauce and gussied up with pineapple and maraschino cherries) was popularized in the post-WWII era when Americans were enamored with "Polynesian," or pseudo-Hawaiian-Chinese cooking. Inspiring Trader Vic's restaurant to put sweet-and-sour chicken on its menu. But the dish doesn't have much of a foothold in true Chinese cuisine, where the sweet-and-sour combo is almost exclusively associated with fish. In fact, in *The Food of China* (1988), author E.N. Anderson writes that "the Cantonese regard the whole business as proof that Westerners are cultureless barbarians."

REBECCA HAYS

Fried Peach Hand Pies

After sampling this unbelievably delicious Alabama specialty, even the fry-shy wanted in on the act.

BY CECELIA JENKINS

MANY RESTAURANTS IN the South pride themselves on their peach pies. Some even tout their peach hand pies. But the folks at Peach Park in Clanton, Alabama (see "On the Road"), really have some thing to crow about: *deep fried* peach hand pies. Golden brown crescents of tender dough filled with bright, sweet peaches, these popular little treats draw crowds from miles around. I wanted to create a recipe so the rest of us could get in on the action

The crust in Peach Park's hand pies is not quite stiff or sturdy like tart crust, not quite flaky like pie pastry, and not quite bready like fried dough. Instead, it's somewhere in between—delicate and tender but crumbly, like soft shortbread without the snap. And the filling is pure peach flavor, with none of the spice add-ins that inform other pie fillings (think apple).

I'd tackle the filling first. I knew that to achieve the clearest peach flavor, I had to keep it simple. I tried a batch using just peaches and no sugar, but the result was dull. My next round pitted granulated sugar against brown sugar: Granulated won, boosting the sweet peach flavor without adding any distractions like molasses or caramel, as the brown sugar did. A few method tests helped me settle on my simple process. Peeled, sliced peaches (or frozen—both worked beautifully) joined granulated sugar and a pinch of salt in the saucepan over medium heat. Covered, they began to soften in about 5 minutes (longer for frozen peaches), after which I uncovered the saucepan and gently mashed the peaches, releasing juices that reduced and concentrated the peach flavor. Once the filling thickened, all it needed was a bit of lemon juice for vibrancy

My bigger challenge was the crust: soft and tender, almost breaking in half under its own weight if held upright, yet just sturdy enough to be portable. To get my bearings and confirm my suspi cion that it wouldn't be the right path, I tried a standard pie dough first, cutting chilled fat into flour. But as expected, the resulting fried pies were too flaky. A slightly wetter dough fried up to resemble peach filled doughnuts, and lard based doughs tasted too similar to fried dough. These were happy experi ments because all were tasty, but none hit the target I aimed for.

Fresh or frozen peaches both work to create this sweet (but not too sweet), peachy pie filling

I took a hard look at pastry mechan ics: Cutting cold butter into flour creates pockets of fat and moisture that give rise to flakiness What if I instead added melted butter? I pulsed the melted butter with the flour in the food proces sor, coating every speck of flour in fat. The result? A soft, pliable dough that fried up tender and just sturdy enough.

And while this crust was good—it still wasn't quite right. I wanted a faint, dainty, almost imperceptible crumble. To get it, I deviated even further from traditional pie dough, adding baking powder to the mix and swapping out water in favor of milk. To avoid breadi ness, I decreased the amount of milk from ¾ cup to only ½ cup. With that final adjustment, I had a dough that was simple to prepare and, after chilling in the fridge for a spell (as most doughs do), a breeze to work with.

After portioning the dough into eight pieces, I rolled the pieces into rounds, placed a small amount of filling on each, folded them all into half moon shapes, crimped the edges of each half moon, and slipped them all gently into the oil I couldn't believe how satisfying it was to watch them turn a beautiful golden brown, and my tasters couldn't believe how satisfying it was to eat these perfect little pies.

The American Table
Portable Fried Pies

Hand-size, portable fruit pies have been around in America since colonial times, most likely arriving with British settlers. During that era, the individual pies were generally made from dried fruit—usually peaches or apples—and were typically fried, not baked. That's because it was easier for cooks to monitor the doneness of delicate pastry in a pot of boiling lard (or other fat) than it was when the pies were placed at the hearthside to bake. What's more, many homes in those days weren't equipped with the type of three-sided ovens necessary for hearth baking, but they did have pots that could be strategically positioned over a fire for deep frying.

The tradition of frying individual hand pies is one that will likely always have a place in American cookery. Even McDonald's fried its individual apple pies until 1992, when it switched to baking. Just last year, however, in response to public requests, some Southern California outlets of the chain reverted to frying the pies. –REBECCA HAYS

No oven? Just suspend an iron pot over the fire and deep-fry instead

FRIED PEACH PIES **Makes 8 hand pies**

If using frozen peaches, purchase a no-sugar-added product; we prefer Earthbound Farm or Cascadian Farm frozen peaches. There is no need to thaw the frozen peaches, but they will take longer to cook; times for both fresh and frozen are given in step 1. Use a Dutch oven that holds 6 quarts or more for frying. The assembled pies can be refrigerated for up to 24 hours before frying.

- **4 ripe peaches, peeled, halved, pitted, and cut into ½-inch wedges, or 20 ounces frozen peaches**
- **½ cup (3½ ounces) sugar**
- **Salt**
- **2 teaspoons lemon juice**
- **2 cups (10 ounces) all-purpose flour**
- **2 teaspoons baking powder**
- **6 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted and cooled**
- **½ cup whole milk**
- **2 quarts peanut or vegetable oil**

1. Combine peaches, sugar, and ⅛ teaspoon salt in medium saucepan. Cover and cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally and breaking up peaches with spoon, until tender, about 5 minutes for fresh peaches and 16 to 19 minutes for frozen peaches.

2. Uncover and continue to cook, stirring and mashing frequently with potato masher to coarse puree, until mixture is thickened and measures about 1⅔ cups, 7 to 13 minutes. Remove from heat, stir in lemon juice, and let cool completely. (Filling can be refrigerated for up to 3 days.)

3. Line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Pulse flour, baking powder, and ¾ teaspoon salt in food processor until combined, about 3 pulses. Add melted butter and pulse until mixture resembles wet sand, about 8 pulses, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Add milk and process until no floury bits remain and dough looks pebbly, about 8 seconds.

4. Turn dough onto lightly floured counter, gather into disk, and divide into 8 equal pieces. Roll each piece between your hands into ball, then press to flatten into round. Place rounds on prepared sheet, cover with plastic wrap, and refrigerate for 20 minutes.

5. Working with 1 piece of dough at a time, roll into 6- to 7-inch circle about ⅛ inch thick on lightly floured counter. Place 3 tablespoons filling in center of circle. Brush edges of dough with water and fold dough over filling to create half moon shape, lightly pressing out air at seam. Trim any ragged edges and crimp edges with tines of fork to seal. Return pies to prepared sheet, cover with plastic, and refrigerate until ready to fry, up to 24 hours.

6. Line platter with triple layer of paper towels. Add oil to large Dutch oven until it measures about 1½ inches deep and heat over medium high heat to 375 degrees. Gently place 4 pies in hot oil and fry until golden brown, about 1½ minutes per side, using slotted spatula or spider to flip. Adjust burner, if necessary, to maintain oil temperature between 350 and 375 degrees. Transfer to prepared platter. Return oil to 375 degrees and repeat with remaining 4 pies. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

Peach Park

The massive, peach-shaped water tower looming over Clanton, Alabama, heralds Peach Park, a roadside retail attraction and restaurant that serves as the spiritual center of Alabama's peach-producing region. Out front, an open-air market sells fresh produce (peaches, mostly) and peach-based pantry products. Inside, a long cafeteria case houses meat-and-three fare (preludes, perhaps, to peach ice cream and peach cobbler). Portraits of the reigning Miss Peach and her younger counterparts Junior Miss Peach, Young Miss Peach, and Little Miss Peach honor their regal stone-fruit court.

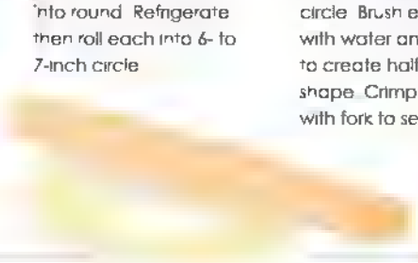
But the best reason to visit Peach Park is the fried peach hand pies. Rumor has it these sweet, warm pies were created as a way to use up overripe peaches, too soft and ugly to sell as is but still full of peach flavor. I'm a man who rarely finishes his sweets, but at Peach Park, I left no leftovers. –BRYAN ROOF

AT A GLANCE **Fried Peach Pies**

Fresh or frozen peaches work equally well in these pies. Be careful not to overfill them.

COOK FILLING
Simmer peaches, sugar, and salt until tender, then mash and cook until thickened. Add lemon juice and let cool.

MAKE DOUGH
Pulse flour, baking powder, and salt, then pulse in melted butter. Add milk and process until pebbly.



SHAPE AND ROLL
Divide dough into 8 pieces. Roll each piece into ball, then flatten into round. Refrigerate then roll each into 6- to 7-inch circle.

FILL AND FOLD
Place 3 tablespoons filling in center of circle. Brush edges with water and fold to create half-moon shape. Crimp edges with fork to seal.

FRY AND FLIP
Deep-fry pies 4 at a time, 1½ minutes per side.

DRAIN AND SERVE
Transfer pies to paper towel–lined platter. Let cool for 10 minutes before serving.

Illustration, Lauren Pettapiece. Photos: (left) Courtesy of Library of Congress; Right, Steve Klise

Mississippi Mud Pie

Our approach to Mississippi mud pie was clear: When in doubt, add more chocolate. BY CHRISTIE MORRISON

This dessert takes time and attention. But the payoff—deep, multifaceted chocolate flavor in a striated showstopper—is huge.

THE ORIGIN OF Mississippi mud pie is as murky as the depths of the river for which it was (allegedly) named. Close kin to mud pie, a layered dessert of coffee ice cream and chocolate shavings nestled in a chocolate cookie crust that dates back to 1962, Mississippi mud's name is supposedly derived from the layers' resemblance to the silty bottom of the Mississippi River. Beyond that, recipes read like a choose-your-own adventure book. Pick a crust, build a gooey chocolate layer, and then top it with something cool and creamy.

But know this: Mississippi mud pie is a project. No way around it. My goal was to divide and conquer, making each component as foolproof and simple as possible. As I began to build my own Mississippi mud pie, I imposed only one strict limitation: When in doubt, follow the chocolate current. Why muddy the waters with anything else?

I started with the crust. Most recipes set the chocolate tone with a crumb crust, made from chocolate wafers or sandwich cookies, rather than a pastry crust. I was on board with the crumb crust for its ease and crunch, opting for the mild sweetness of chocolate wafer cookies pulsed in the food processor to a fine crumb. Some melted butter brought it together and made it easy to press into a pie plate for a short parbake in the oven.

Next up: the middle layer, also chocolate. I knew I was after the gooey, fudgy texture of a slightly undercooked brownie, much like a pie that a test kitchen colleague developed a few years ago—Fudgy Tar Heel Pie (August/September 2013). Essentially a brownie baked into a pie, it's made with dark brown sugar (which contains molasses, adding moisture) and both butter and vegetable oil for a perfect chewy texture. Minor tinkering with this recipe, plus underbaking it slightly, gave me just the texture I wanted.

It was the third layer where things started to fishtail. Like mud pie, many Mississippi mud pies are topped with ice cream—usually coffee or vanilla. But for all of ice cream's virtues, its temperature sensitivity made testing, transportation, and storage difficult. Also out: whipped cream (too light) and chocolate pudding (too much work). I set my sights on a mousse. Chocolate, of course.

Instead of a traditional mousse made with whipped egg whites, I started with something easier: a simple mousse made with milk chocolate, cocoa powder, and whipped cream. After several tests, I found that warming a small portion of the cream slightly was the best, most reliable method to get the cocoa fully incorporated; adding this back to the rest of the cream meant it stayed cool enough to whip effectively. Adding confectioners' sugar before whipping helped stabilize the whipped cream and made folding in the melted, cooled chocolate that much easier.

What wasn't easy was spooning it directly onto the still-warm brownie layer—doing so gave me a soupy mess. The fix was simple, requiring nothing more than patience: I let the brownie layer cool completely and then slid it into the fridge to chill for an hour. The cooler surface held on to the mousse with no soupy side effects.

With a chocolate lily this beautiful, why not gild it—or rather, cover it in more chocolate? I crushed a handful of chocolate wafers into coarse crumbs; tossed them with cocoa powder, confectioners' sugar, and melted butter; and baked them on a baking sheet into a streusel-like crumble to sprinkle over the top for a final chocolaty crunch.

Anatomy of a Slice: Four Layers of Chocolate

Our Mississippi Mud Pie recipe relies on two types of bar chocolate plus cocoa powder and chocolate wafer cookies to hit every chocolate note in the book. The upshot? Deep, complex, and unforgettable chocolate flavor

COOKIE GARNISH
Toast wafer cookie pieces with melted butter, cocoa, and sugar for a chocolate streusel topping

PRESS-IN CRUST
Process chocolate wafer cookies with melted butter to form a crumb crust

FLUFFY TOP
For a simple chocolate mousse, whip cream with sugar and cocoa before folding into melted milk chocolate

FUDGY MIDDLE
Combine bittersweet chocolate and cocoa in a brownie-like batter and underbake it slightly to create a chewy middle layer

MISSISSIPPI MUD PIE Serves 8 to 12

This recipe takes at least 5 hours from start to finish, so plan accordingly. We used Nabisco Famous Chocolate Wafers in this recipe. Be sure to use milk chocolate in the mousse, as bittersweet chocolate will make the mousse too firm. Our favorite milk chocolate is Dove Silky Smooth Milk Chocolate, and our preferred bittersweet chocolate is Ghirardelli 60% Cacao Bittersweet Chocolate Premium Baking Bar. Note that you shouldn't begin making the mousse until the brownie layer is fully chilled.

CRUST
- **25 chocolate wafer cookies (5½ ounces), broken into coarse pieces**
- **4 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**

BROWNIE LAYER
- **4 ounces bittersweet chocolate, chopped fine**
- **3 tablespoons unsalted butter**
- **3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **1½ tablespoons Dutch-processed cocoa powder**
- **⅔ cup packed (4⅔ ounces) dark brown sugar**
- **2 large eggs**
- **2 teaspoons vanilla extract**
- **¼ teaspoon salt**
- **3 tablespoons all-purpose flour**

TOPPING
- **10 chocolate wafer cookies (2 ounces)**
- **2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar**
- **1 tablespoon Dutch-processed cocoa powder**
- **⅛ teaspoon salt**
- **2 tablespoons unsalted butter, melted**

MOUSSE
- **6 ounces milk chocolate, chopped fine**
- **1 cup heavy cream, chilled**
- **2 tablespoons Dutch-processed cocoa powder**
- **2 tablespoons confectioners' sugar**
- **⅛ teaspoon salt**

1. FOR THE CRUST: Adjust oven rack to middle position and heat oven to 325 degrees. Process cookie pieces in food processor until finely ground, about 30 seconds. Add melted butter and pulse until combined, about 6 pulses. Using bottom of dry measuring cup, press crumbs firmly into bottom and up sides of 9 inch pie plate. Bake until fragrant and set, about 15 minutes. Transfer to wire rack.

2. FOR THE BROWNIE LAYER: Combine chocolate, butter, oil, and cocoa in bowl and microwave at 50 percent power, stirring often, until melted, about 1½ minutes. In separate bowl, whisk sugar, eggs, vanilla, and salt until smooth. Whisk in chocolate mixture until incorporated. Whisk in flour until just combined.

3. Pour brownie batter into crust (crust needn't be cool at this point). Bake pie until edges begin to set and toothpick inserted in center comes out with thin coating of batter attached, about 15 minutes. Transfer to wire rack and let cool for 1 hour, then refrigerate until fully chilled, about 1 hour longer.

4. FOR THE TOPPING: Meanwhile, line rimmed baking sheet with parchment paper. Place cookies in zipper-lock bag, press out air, and seal bag. Using rolling pin, crush cookies into ½ to ¾ inch pieces. Combine sugar, cocoa, salt, and crushed cookies in bowl. Stir in melted butter until mixture is moistened and clumps begin to form. Spread crumbs in even layer on prepared sheet and bake until fragrant, about 10 minutes, shaking sheet to break up crumbs halfway through baking. Transfer sheet to wire rack and let cool completely.

5. FOR THE MOUSSE: Once brownie layer has fully chilled, microwave chocolate in large bowl at 50 percent power, stirring often, until melted, 1½ to 2 minutes. Let cool until just barely warm and registers between 90 and 100 degrees, about 10 minutes.

6. Microwave 3 tablespoons cream in small bowl until it registers 105 to 110 degrees, about 15 seconds. Whisk in cocoa until homogeneous. Combine cocoa cream mixture, sugar, salt, and remaining cream in bowl of stand mixer. Fit mixer with whisk and whip cream mixture on medium speed until beginning to thicken, about 30 seconds, scraping down bowl as needed. Increase speed to high and whip until soft peaks form, 30 to 60 seconds.

7. Using whisk, fold one third of whipped cream mixture into melted chocolate to lighten. Using rubber spatula, fold in remaining whipped cream mixture until no dark streaks remain. Spoon mousse into chilled pie and spread evenly from edge to edge. Sprinkle with cooled topping and refrigerate for at least 3 hours or overnight. Serve.

The American Table
Nabisco Chocolate Wafers

In 1924, Nabisco (then called National Biscuit Company) introduced its Famous Chocolate Wafers packed in tins. Today, the thin, crispy wafers are a cult favorite. We use them as a base and topping for Mississippi Mud Pie, but their best-known use is in Nabisco's Famous Chocolate Refrigerator Roll, a recipe that's been printed on the packaging since 1930. It calls for sandwiching sweetened whipped cream between the wafers, stacking them into a log, frosting it with even more whipped cream, and refrigerating.

REBECCA HAYS

AMERICAN CLASSIC
Like a thinner, crispier Oreo without the filling.

WHEN THINGS GO WRONG Loose Mousse

Our first couple of tests produced mousse that was a far cry from the fluffy-yet-sliceable mixture that we ended up with. Two key changes helped us get the right texture. First, we swapped granulated sugar for starchier confectioners' sugar. Second, we made sure to let the chocolate cool to between 90 and 100 degrees before incorporating it—any warmer and the chocolate deflated the mousse.

DEFLATEGATE?
If the chocolate's too hot, the mousse won't set properly

Illustration: Lauren Pettapiece

Cooking Class Grilled Boneless, Skinless Chicken Breasts

Grilled chicken breasts can be a juicy, well-seasoned meal—or a dry, flavorless regret. Here's our guide to success. BY CHRIST E MORRISON

GRILLED BONELESS, SKINLESS CHICKEN BREASTS Serves 4

This chicken can be served with one of our three sauces (recipes follow) alongside a simply prepared vegetable for a light dinner. The chicken can also be used in a sandwich or sliced and tossed with greens for a salad. The chicken takes longer to cook on a gas grill, so begin checking it at the end of the range in step 4. The chicken should be marinated for no less than 30 minutes and no more than 12 hours

- **3 tablespoons vegetable oil**
- **3 tablespoons water**
- **3 garlic cloves, minced**
- **1 teaspoon sugar**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed**
- **1 (13 by 9-inch) disposable aluminum roasting pan (if using charcoal)**

1. Whisk oil, water, garlic, sugar, 1½ teaspoons salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Transfer mixture to 1 gallon zipper lock bag Add chicken, press out air, seal bag, and turn bag so that contents are evenly distributed. Refrigerate for 30 minutes or up to 12 hours

2A. FOR A CHARCOAL GRILL: Open bottom vent completely. Light large chimney starter filled with charcoal briquettes (6 quarts). When top coals are partially covered with ash, pour coals evenly over half of grill. Set cooking grate in place, cover, and open lid vent completely. Heat grill until hot, about 5 minutes.

2B. FOR A GAS GRILL: Turn all burners to high, cover, and heat grill until hot, about 15 minutes. Leave primary burner on high and turn off other burner(s).

3. Clean and oil cooking grate. Place chicken on cooler side of grill, skinned side down, with thicker ends facing coals. (Edges of chicken should be no more than 4 inches from center of primary burner if using gas.) Cover with disposable pan if using charcoal (if using gas, close lid) and cook until bottom of chicken just begins to develop light grill marks and is no longer pink, 6 to 9 minutes

4. Flip chicken and rotate so that thinner ends face coals Cover as before and continue to cook until chicken registers 140 degrees, 6 to 9 minutes longer

5. Remove disposable pan and transfer chicken to hotter side of grill. Cook chicken (covered if using gas), until dark grill marks appear, 2 to 4 minutes Flip chicken and cook, (covered if using gas), until marked on second side and registering 160 degrees, 2 to 4 minutes longer. Transfer chicken to cutting board, tent with aluminum foil, and let rest for 5 minutes Serve.

STEP BY STEP **Grilled Boneless, Skinless Chicken Breasts**

1. MAKE BRINERADE
Whisk the oil, water, garlic, sugar, salt, and pepper together in a bowl.
WHY? In addition to thoroughly seasoning the meat, the salt helps keep it moist. The sugar helps brown the chicken's exterior

2. GIVE IT TIME
Place the chicken and brinerade in a zipper-lock bag and refrigerate it for 30 minutes to 12 hours.
WHY? The longer the chicken remains in the salt-and-oil mixture, the more flavorful it will be But don't let it sit for more than 12 hours, or it will become too salty.

3. PREHEAT GRILL
Pour the coals evenly over half the grill. Set the cooking grate in place, cover, and heat the grill for about 5 minutes
WHY? Preheating the grill ensures proper cooking times. Heating the cooking grate also loosens stuck-on debris so it is easy to brush clean.

4. CLEAN AND OIL GRATE
Clean the grill with a grill brush to remove debris; then, rub the grill grate with an oil-soaked paper towel, using long-handled tongs to grip the towel
WHY? Slicking the grate with oil helps keep the chicken breasts from sticking

5. PLACE CHICKEN ON COOLER SIDE Place the chicken breasts on the cooler side of the grill with their thicker ends facing the coals.
WHY? Grilling the chicken breasts on the cooler side of the grill over indirect heat helps avoid a tough, leathery exterior

Need a Sauce?

CLASSIC PESTO

Toast 3 unpeeled garlic cloves over medium heat until exteriors are spotty brown, about 8 minutes; let cool and discard skins. Process garlic, ¼ cup toasted pine nuts, 2 cups fresh basil leaves, 7 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, ¼ cup grated Parmesan cheese, and ½ teaspoon salt in food processor until smooth, about 1 minute. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

PEANUT SAUCE

Heat 1 tablespoon vegetable oil in small saucepan over medium heat until shimmering. Add 3 tablespoons packed dark brown sugar, 2 minced garlic cloves, and 1 tablespoon Thai red curry paste and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Add 1 cup canned coconut milk and bring to boil. Whisk in ⅓ cup chunky peanut butter, 1 tablespoon fish sauce, 1 tablespoon lime juice, and 1 teaspoon soy sauce. Serve.

RED CHIMICHURRI SAUCE

Whisk 1 finely chopped onion, ½ cup minced fresh parsley, ½ cup red wine vinegar, ½ cup extra-virgin olive oil, 3 minced garlic cloves, 1 tablespoon paprika, ½ teaspoon kosher salt, and ¼ teaspoon red pepper flakes together in bowl. Cover and let stand at room temperature for at least 30 minutes. Rewhisk and serve.

Good to Know

TEST KITCHEN TIPS FOR GRILLED CHICKEN

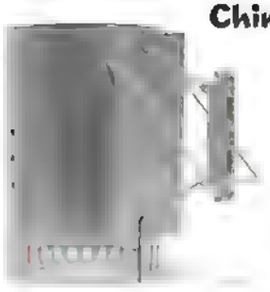
Marinade + Brine = Brinerade

There are two different yet commonly used methods to season meat before throwing it on the grill: a marinade or a brine. The primary goal of soaking meat in a marinade (typically a mixture of oil, herbs, and spices) is to add as much flavor to the exterior of the meat as possible. Conversely, letting meat sit in a brine (a simple solution of salt and water) effectively seasons the interior of the meat as well as helps keep it moist. To get the best of both worlds in this recipe we combine a brine (a solution of water, salt, and sugar) with a classic marinade (vegetable oil and minced garlic cloves).

Cook First; Sear Second

Most recipes call for searing chicken breasts over hot coals and then moving them to the cooler side of the grill to finish cooking. But we have found that this approach can result in overdone, dry meat and a leathery exterior. To produce perfectly cooked, juicy chicken with substantial grill marks, we use a reverse-sear approach. First, we grill the chicken over the cooler side of the grill, giving it time to slowly cook through via convective heat. Then, when the chicken is just shy of done, we move it to the hotter side of the grill for a quick sear that won't overcook the meat.

Chimney Starters 101



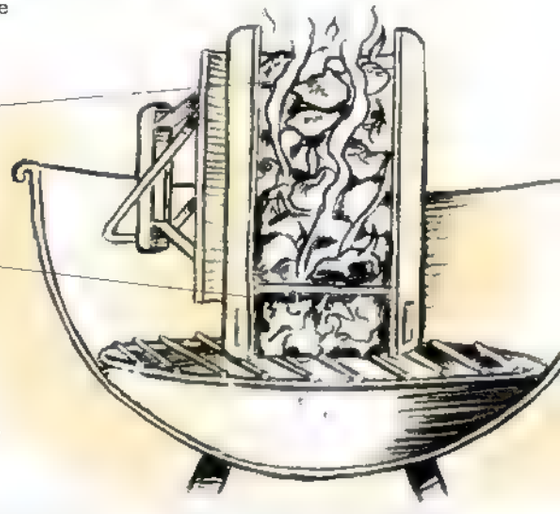
TEST KITCHEN WINNER
The Weber Rapidfire Chimney Starter ($14.99) is a must-have for charcoal grillers.

The Best Tool for the Job

When grilling with charcoal, forget about lighter fluid, which inevitably leaves harsh, acrid flavors in food. Instead, follow the lead of all of our charcoal grilling recipes and use a chimney starter, which lights briquettes safely and efficiently. We like the Weber Rapidfire Chimney Starter; it's easy to control, holds a generous 6 quarts of charcoal, and boasts a heatproof handle. For more info, go to **CooksCountry.com/chimneystarter.**

How to Use It

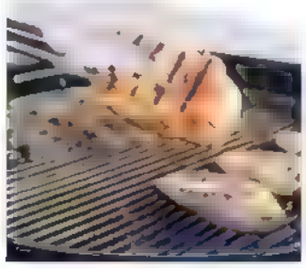
To light the charcoal, fill the bottom compartment with crumpled newspaper (two sheets are optimal, any more will inhibit airflow and extend the time it takes to light the coals). Set the starter on the bottom rack of the grill, fill the main compartment with as much charcoal as the recipe calls for, and light the newspaper. When the coals are adequately heated, they will be partially covered with a layer of thin, gray ash. This typically takes 30 minutes for a full chimney. You're now ready to dump out the coals onto the bottom grate.


The **coals** are lit when they're covered in a thin layer of gray ash
Two sheets of crumpled **newspaper** are all you need to get the fire started.
You can vary the amount of **briquettes** you add to the chimney depending on the heat level called for in a recipe. A full chimney holds 6 quarts.

6. COVER CHICKEN
Cover the chicken with a disposable pan if you're using charcoal (if you're using gas, close the lid).
WHY? Trapping the heat under the pan (or under the lid if using gas) for most of the grilling time ensures that the chicken breasts will cook evenly.

7. FLIP AND ROTATE
Flip the chicken breasts and rotate them so that the thinner ends are facing the coals.
WHY? The side closest to the coals will cook faster; flipping and rotating the breasts evens out the cooking.

8. UNDERCOOK SLIGHTLY
Cook the chicken until it is firm to the touch and registers 140 degrees.
WHY? Grilling the chicken breasts until they are slightly underdone means you can sear them directly over the coals without overcooking them.



9. SEAR QUICKLY
Transfer the chicken breasts to the hotter side of the grill and sear them until dark grill marks appear.
WHY? Placing the chicken directly over the heat at the end of cooking adds appealing grill marks and flavorful char.

10. LET REST
Transfer the chicken breasts to a cutting board, tent them with aluminum foil, and let them rest for 5 minutes before serving.
WHY? Letting the chicken breasts rest gives the juices time to redistribute before slicing.

Illustration: Ross MacDonald

Cooking for Two Chicken Parmesan

What's better than a huge batch of chicken Parmesan? A very small batch. BY KATIE LEAIRD

CHICKEN PARMESAN IS a study in contrasts: crunchy cutlets, smooth sauce, and oozy mozzarella. All the elements should shine, individually and together.

For a quick and easy version to serve two, I chose two 6-ounce breasts. And because chicken breasts are often thick at one end and thin at the other, they can cook unevenly; gently pounding just the thick portion evened things out. I seasoned the cutlets with salt and pepper and let them sit for 20 minutes to allow the salt to penetrate the meat.

Usually, there are three steps to coating cutlets for frying. First, the slippery chicken is dredged in flour to create a dry surface. Then, it's dunked in beaten egg—a sort of edible adhesive. Finally, a mixture of bread crumbs and grated Parmesan is pressed into the meat. It works, but I found a faster way: By combining the first two steps into one—whisking the flour and egg together in one bowl—this became a two-step process.

Shallow frying the breaded chicken breasts produced a crispy exterior with juicy white meat on the inside, and since I was making only two portions, I didn't have to do it in batches. I topped both portions with mozzarella and popped them into the oven to broil. Some sauce and fresh basil completed the dish.

Why Remove the Tenderloin?

Not removing a tenderloin before pounding leaves you with misshapen cutlets.

Boneless, skinless chicken breasts often come with the long, slender tenderloin tenuously attached. To make the cutlets more shapely, we recommend removing the tenderloins before pounding and saving them for another use, such as in soup, stir-fries, or salads. Simply pull the tenderloin off with your hands and then strip out the white tendon that runs through it by grabbing the end of the tendon with a dish towel and pulling.

CHICKEN PARMESAN FOR TWO

This recipe makes enough sauce to top the cutlets and up to a pound of pasta. Any extra sauce can be refrigerated for up to three days or frozen for up to a month. If the cheese browns before the chicken registers 160 degrees, cover the chicken with aluminum foil and continue to broil.

SAUCE

- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- Salt
- ¼ teaspoon dried oregano
- Pinch red pepper flakes
- 1 (28-ounce) can crushed tomatoes
- ¼ teaspoon sugar

CHICKEN AND PASTA

- 2 (6-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed
- Salt and pepper
- 4 ounces capellini
- 1 large egg
- 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1 ounce Parmesan cheese, grated (½ cup)
- ½ cup panko bread crumbs
- ½ teaspoon garlic powder
- ½ teaspoon dried oregano
- ⅓ cup vegetable oil
- 2 ounces whole-milk mozzarella cheese, shredded (½ cup)
- 2 tablespoons sliced fresh basil

1. FOR THE SAUCE: Heat 1 tablespoon oil in medium saucepan over medium heat until shimmering. Add garlic, ¾ teaspoon salt, oregano, and pepper flakes; cook, stirring occasionally, until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes and sugar and bring to simmer. Reduce heat to medium-low, cover with lid slightly ajar, and simmer until thickened, about 20 minutes. Off heat, stir in remaining 1 tablespoon oil. Cover and keep warm.

2. FOR THE CHICKEN AND PASTA: Remove tenderloins from breasts and reserve for another use. Pound each breast between 2 pieces of plastic wrap to even ½ inch thickness. Season chicken all over with salt and pepper; let stand at room temperature for 20 minutes.

3. Bring 2 quarts water to boil in large saucepan over high heat. Add pasta and ½ tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot. Toss pasta with ¾ cup sauce. Cover and keep warm.

4. Meanwhile, whisk egg and flour in shallow dish until smooth. Combine Parmesan, panko, garlic powder, oregano, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in second shallow dish. Pat chicken dry with paper towels. Working with 1 piece at a time, dunk chicken in egg mixture, allowing excess to drip off, then dredge in panko mixture to coat both sides, pressing gently so crumbs adhere. Transfer to plate.

5. Adjust oven rack 4 inches from broiler element and heat broiler. Heat oil in 10-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until shimmering. Carefully place chicken in skillet and cook until deep golden brown, about 3 minutes per side.

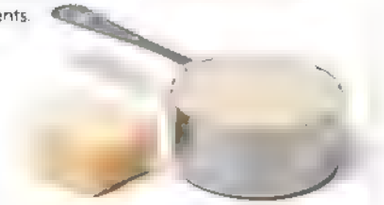
6. Transfer chicken to rimmed baking sheet and sprinkle mozzarella evenly over top. Broil until cheese is melted and beginning to brown and chicken registers 160 degrees, 2 to 4 minutes. Transfer chicken to serving plates. Top each piece with 2 tablespoons sauce and sprinkle each with 1 tablespoon basil. Adjust pasta consistency with reserved cooking water as needed and serve with chicken.

Chicken Parmesan without a side of pasta is just lonely

Streamlined Breading

A classic bound breading process calls for three steps: dipping first in flour, then in egg, and then in bread crumbs. Our abbreviated two-step technique works just as well. Here's how we group the ingredients.

FIRST DIP: EGG AND FLOUR
Instead of dunking into each ingredient separately, we whisk the flour and egg together.



SECOND DIP: PARMESAN AND PANKO
A coating of bread crumbs flavored with Parmesan completes the process.

Five Easy Rice Pilafs

Plain rice has its place at the table. But we'd rather invite something more interesting.

BY ASHLEY MOORE

PLAIN STEAMED RICE is enough for some. But for me, the best role rice can play is serving as a solid base for other flavors. As in, for example, rice pilaf.

The test kitchen's basic method for rice pilaf is simple. First, uncooked long-grain rice is sautéed in butter until the grains begin to become translucent around the edges. This step helps develop rich, nutty flavors and also begins to set the starches in the grains, providing extra insurance against clumping. Next comes water, 2¼ cups for 1½ cups of rice. Once the water boils, the lid goes on the saucepan and the heat's turned down. Twenty minutes of steaming ensue, followed by an off heat rest of 10 minutes. The result? Flavorful rice that stays in distinct, separate grains.

With something this simple, why not add even more flavor? I toasted the rice in butter with a bit of chopped onion, garlic, and fresh thyme. And rather than water, I cooked my pilaf in chicken broth. The result was deeply savory.

For one variation, I added some vibrant chopped jalapeño at the beginning and a bit of grated lime zest with the chicken broth. For another, I added some curry powder up front and stirred in some crunchy chopped apples and cilantro just before serving. For a bright, herby variation, I introduced lemon zest, tarragon, parsley, and toasted almonds. And for a savory, cool evening variation, I added some mushrooms and poultry seasoning.

KEY STEP Toasting Makes It Pilaf

The step that sets pilaf apart from plain steamed rice is toasting the grains in fat (here, we use butter). Toasting not only helps keep the grains separate and creates a fluffy texture but also gives the pilaf a rich, nutty taste.

BASIC RICE PILAF Serves 4 to 6

Our preferred long-grain rice is Lundberg Organic Long-Grain White Rice. Allow the rice to cook for the full 20 minutes before lifting the lid to check it.

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 small onion, chopped fine
- Salt and pepper
- 1½ cups long-grain white rice
- 2 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 teaspoon minced fresh thyme
- 2¼ cups chicken broth

1. Melt butter in large saucepan over medium-high heat. Add onion and ¾ teaspoon salt and cook until just softened, about 3 minutes. Add rice and cook, stirring frequently, until edges begin to turn translucent, about 2 minutes. Stir in garlic and thyme and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds.

2. Stir in broth and bring to boil. Cover, reduce heat to low, and cook until liquid is absorbed and rice is tender, about 20 minutes. Keep covered and remove from heat. Let stand for 10 minutes. Fluff rice with fork. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

CILANTRO RICE PILAF WITH JALAPEÑO

Omit thyme. Add 1 seeded and minced jalapeño with garlic. Add 2 teaspoons grated lime zest with broth. Stir ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro into fluffed rice.

CURRIED RICE PILAF WITH APPLES

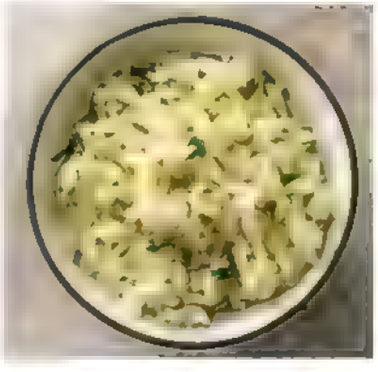
Omit thyme. Add 1 tablespoon curry powder with onion. Stir 1 peeled and finely chopped apple and ¼ cup chopped fresh cilantro into fluffed rice.

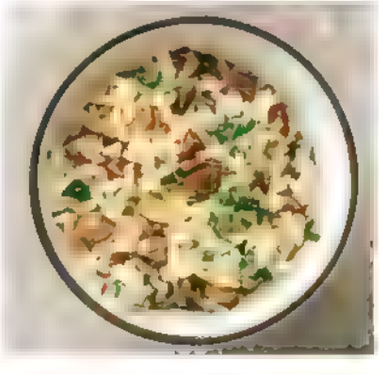
HERBED RICE PILAF WITH ALMONDS

Add 2 teaspoons grated lemon zest with broth. Stir ¼ cup whole almonds, toasted and chopped coarse; ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley; and 2 teaspoons chopped fresh tarragon into fluffed rice.

MUSHROOM RICE PILAF WITH THYME

Add 2 ounces finely chopped cremini mushrooms with onion. Add 1 teaspoon poultry seasoning with garlic. Stir 2 tablespoons chopped fresh parsley into fluffed rice.





Our simple toast-then-steam method brings out rice's nuttier side. Above: Basic Rice Pilaf. Below, clockwise from left: Cilantro with Jalapeño, Curried with Apples, Herbed with Almonds, and Mushroom with Thyme

Slow Cooker Pasta Genovese

Onions are the surprising key to this dish's rich flavor, but in the slow cooker, they misbehaved. BY KATIE LEAIRD

WARM, MEATY, RAGU-DRESSED noodles are about as comforting as you can get, and pasta Genovese, a 19th-century dish (brought to the States by immigrants from Naples rather than Genoa, though its name suggests otherwise), is a prime example. The peasant-style sauce simmers for hours until the meat becomes fork-tender and the flavors meld into a beefy pasta blanket. It happens to be especially well suited to the slow cooker—and to the wallet because, despite its beefy profile, the main ingredient is the inexpensive onion.

Besides the rare exception, like French onion soup, onions aren't usually the star of a recipe, perhaps partly because of the intense, sulfuric aroma they emit when raw. But when onions are cooked slowly and carefully in water, this unpleasant aspect becomes an asset (see "Frugal Flavor Maker").

Our more traditional stovetop recipe for pasta Genovese uses chuck eye roast, an often-overlooked cut of meat spotted with thick fat deposits. Though too tough for a quick steak, chuck eye roast thrives in the low-and-slow environment of the slow cooker, where the fat and collagen have time to melt and break down into a velvety sauce. About a pound would be enough for sauce for six to eight servings.

In the old country, this dish would start with kitchen scraps; cooks would mash together scraps of pancetta or leftover salami with some celery and carrot trimmings to make a paste. I did the same in the food processor, using 2 ounces each of the cured meats, one carrot, and one stalk of celery to build a flavorful backdrop for the sauce.

Using our stovetop recipe for inspiration, I combined this paste with 2 pounds of chopped onions, some cut-up chuck eye, a bit of liquid (water and wine), and a few other ingredients in the slow cooker and walked away for a few hours. Disaster. I had a soup instead of a sauce. Because the slow cooker creates a sealed environment, there was no opportunity for evaporation. I'd have to be stricter with my liquid amounts.

I didn't want to nix the wine because it added flavor and acidity, so I tried the sauce without the water. Still soupy. Where was all that liquid coming from?

The onions, of course. Because they are about 90 percent water, 2 pounds of onions just flooded the slow cooker, diluting the sauce. I needed a way to coax out some of the onions' water ahead of time. To do it, I employed two favorite test kitchen techniques: I first tossed the onions with a little bit of salt to draw moisture out of their cells and then microwaved them for 5 minutes. I was amazed at how much pungent, sulfuric water came out of the onions—in some tests, more than a cup.

After discarding their exuded liquid, I added the drained onions and just enough fresh water back into the meaty mixture (along with wine and a bit of tomato paste for even more depth of flavor) and let the slow cooker do the rest. After 5 to 6 hours on high and a gentle mash with a potato masher, the sauce became a ragu instead of *zuppa*.

Pancetta and salami processed into a paste provide a strong backbone for this satisfying sauce

Onions + Water = Flavor

Usually, creating rich, beefy flavor in a stew or ragu means simmering meat and/or bones to create a potent stock. But we found a cheaper (and easier) approach: simply cook lots of onions with water. How does it work? When chopped onions are heated, some of the onions' compounds turn into a new compound called MMP (an acronym of its scientific name 3-mercapto-2-methylpentan-1-ol), which tastes like beef broth. Because MMP is water-soluble, we cook the onions with water to enhance their meaty, savory flavor.

TWO POUNDS OF ONIONS. REALLY? When cooked in water, this mound of onions gives this dish its depth.

SLOW-COOKER BEEF AND ONION RAGU Serves 6 to 8

In step 6, don't be too forceful while mashing the meat; the action of stirring in the pasta will further break it down.

- 1 (1- to 1¼-pound) boneless beef chuck-eye roast, trimmed and cut into 1½-inch pieces
- Salt and pepper
- 2 pounds onions, chopped coarse
- 2 ounces pancetta, chopped coarse
- 2 ounces salami, chopped coarse
- 1 small carrot, peeled and chopped
- 1 small celery rib, chopped
- ⅓ cup dry white wine
- ¼ cup extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling
- 2 tablespoons tomato paste
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano
- 1 pound rigatoni
- 2 ounces Pecorino Romano cheese, grated (1 cup), plus extra for serving

1. Sprinkle beef with 1 teaspoon salt and ½ teaspoon pepper. Transfer to slow cooker.

2. Pulse onions in food processor until finely minced, about 15 pulses, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Transfer to large bowl and stir in ¼ teaspoon salt. Cover and microwave for 5 minutes. Drain onions in fine-mesh strainer, pressing with rubber spatula to extract excess liquid. Return drained onions to now-empty bowl.

3. Process pancetta, salami, carrot, and celery in now-empty processor until ground to paste, about 45 seconds, scraping down sides of bowl as needed. Transfer pancetta mixture to bowl with onions. Stir wine, ⅓ cup water, 2 tablespoons oil, tomato paste, oregano, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper into onion mixture until thoroughly combined.

4. Pour onion mixture over beef in slow cooker to cover. (Scrape sides of cooker with rubber spatula to remove any onion pieces.) Cover and cook until beef is fully tender, 5 to 6 hours on high or 8 to 9 hours on low.

5. Bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain pasta.

6. Using potato masher, mash meat until coarsely shredded into bite-size pieces. Stir in Pecorino and remaining 2 tablespoons oil. Transfer pasta to slow cooker and stir to combine with sauce. Adjust consistency with reserved cooking water as needed. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve, drizzled with extra oil and sprinkled with extra Pecorino.

One-Pan Dinner Halibut with Potatoes, Corn, and Sausage

The more components, the steeper the challenge. Could we conquer this four-part one-pan supper? BY CECELIA JENKINS

TIMESAVING ONE-PAN SUPPERS can be tricky; all the components need to be cooked evenly and hit the table while they're still hot. For this seaside-style meal, we wanted perfectly cooked fillets of mild, tender halibut with boldly flavored andouille sausage, crispy red potatoes, and juicy corn. But just tossing everything on a baking sheet and cooking it in one visit to the oven produced a mess of overcooked fish, rubbery andouille, rock-hard potatoes, and unevenly cooked corn.

Sorting out this puzzle required first identifying the specific cooking time and temperature for each component. The potatoes needed high heat and the most time to roast. Conveniently, the andouille cooked beautifully along with them in a 500-degree oven, rendering flavorful fat into the pan for the potatoes to soak up.

In contrast to sturdy spuds and sausage, halibut is a delicate fish that needs just a few minutes to reach doneness—any longer and it dries out. I pushed the potatoes and sausage to the side of the pan and added the fish. I immediately dropped the oven to 425 degrees; the fish cooked gently in the declining oven heat, producing soft, tender flesh.

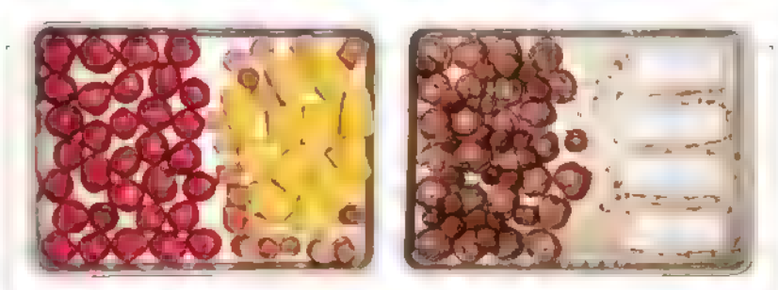
The remaining question mark was the corn. Putting it in to cook with the potatoes and andouille the entire time resulted in raisin-like kernels. But when I added the corn with the fish, the only place I could stick it was atop the potatoes and andouille, where it teetered precariously. The pan was now heavy and unbalanced, a sloppy spill just waiting to happen.

Using small potatoes ensures that all parts of this meal are ready at the same time.

I flipped the script by adding the corn up front with the sausage and potatoes and then swapping it out for the fish. The corn was beautifully cooked, with plump, bright kernels. But would it still be hot at suppertime?

I tossed the corn in a bowl with Old Bay–spiced butter and covered it with foil. It stayed pleasantly warm while everything else finished up.

A few final tweaks: I kept the potatoes cut side down throughout cooking for a deep golden crust. Then, when I took out the pan to remove the finished corn, I moved the andouille on top of the potatoes to make room for the fish. The sausage continued to crisp while its fat trickled onto the potatoes. With a bit more Old Bay butter dolloped on the fish and a sprinkle of fresh parsley, I'd mastered this tricky one-pan challenge.



One Pan, Two Steps

To ensure even cooking, we start with a baking sheet loaded with potatoes, andouille sausage, and corn (left). We remove the corn to make room for the quick-cooking halibut, which finishes at the same time as the potatoes and sausage.

DIY OLD BAY SEASONING

Makes 2 tablespoons

Store-bought Old Bay seasoning contains a mixture of roughly 18 spices. Our streamlined homemade version features the most prominent spices found in the original.

- 1 tablespoon celery salt
- 1½ teaspoons paprika
- 1⅛ teaspoons ground coriander
- ¼ teaspoon cayenne pepper
- ⅛ teaspoon ground cinnamon

Combine ingredients in small bowl.

ONE-PAN HALIBUT WITH RED POTATOES, CORN, AND ANDOUILLE Serves 4

Use small red potatoes measuring 1 to 2 inches in diameter. Note that you need to immediately reduce the oven temperature from 500 to 425 degrees after placing the fish in the oven.

- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter, softened
- 2 teaspoons Old Bay seasoning
- 1 teaspoon lemon juice
- 4 (6- to 8-ounce) center-cut skinless halibut fillets, 1 inch thick
- Salt and pepper
- ¼ cup vegetable oil
- 1½ pounds small red potatoes, unpeeled, halved lengthwise
- 4 ears corn, husks and silk removed, cut into thirds
- 12 ounces andouille sausage, sliced 1 inch thick
- 1 tablespoon minced fresh parsley

1. Adjust oven rack to lowest position and heat oven to 500 degrees. Combine butter, Old Bay, and lemon juice in bowl; set aside. Pat halibut dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper; refrigerate until needed.

2. Brush rimmed baking sheet with 1 tablespoon oil. Toss potatoes, 2 tablespoons oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Arrange potatoes cut side down on half of sheet. Toss corn, remaining 1 tablespoon oil, ¼ teaspoon salt, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper together in now-empty bowl. Arrange corn on empty side of sheet. Nestle andouille pieces around corn.

3. Roast until potatoes and andouille are lightly browned and corn kernels are plump, 20 to 22 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through roasting.

4. Remove sheet from oven, transfer corn and 2 tablespoons Old Bay butter to medium bowl, and toss to combine. Cover bowl tightly with aluminum foil and set aside. Move andouille pieces to side of sheet with potatoes. Arrange halibut fillets evenly on now-empty side of sheet.

5. Return sheet to oven and reduce oven temperature to 425 degrees. Roast until centers of fillets register 130 degrees and flesh is just opaque when checked with tip of paring knife, 8 to 10 minutes, rotating sheet halfway through roasting.

6. Transfer halibut browned side up to serving platter. Portion remaining 2 tablespoons Old Bay butter evenly over halibut. Transfer potatoes, corn, and andouille pieces to platter with halibut and sprinkle with parsley. Serve.

Taste Test All-Beef Hot Dogs

We ate hundreds of hot dogs to unlock the mystery of this classic summertime sausage.

BY LAUREN SAVOIE

FROM THE "HOT WATER" sausages of Coney Island to the pineapple-topped "puka dogs" of Kauai, you can find a hot dog in nearly every corner of America. While how you dress your dog varies with regional custom (like your hot dogs with ketchup? Don't show your face in Chicago), the sausages themselves remain relatively constant across all 50 states—a mixture of meat trimmings, water, salt, and seasonings is stuffed into casings (sometimes natural but usually made from cellulose) and then smoked and cooked. Cellulose casings are stripped off after cooking, so most supermarket hot dogs are skinless.

Traditional frankfurters—the kind originally brought over by European immigrants in the mid-1800s—are primarily pork based and can still be found in supermarkets nationwide. But nearly every hot dog manufacturer we talked to told us that all-beef hot dogs now vastly outsell traditional frankfurters because of their punchier meatiness and more straightforward ingredient list. (Pork frankfurters today are often bulked up with added poultry or soy.) With the goal of finding the best supermarket all-beef hot dogs, we cooked up the seven top-selling national varieties of skinless dogs for 21 America's Test Kitchen staffers. To keep everything consistent, we locked away the condiments and served the hot dogs two ways: first boiled and bunless and then grilled and stuffed into buns.

Tasters immediately took issue with thin or skimpy dogs that practically disappeared when we nestled them into standard buns. Almost half the samples were deemed too petite by tasters, so we broke out a scale and calipers to measure the dogs. Top dogs were up to 12 percent plumper than lower-ranked ones, allowing for a higher meat-to-bun ratio in each bite. Our favorite hot dogs were also almost 20 percent heavier than low-scoring products—51 grams per dog versus 41 grams.

But bigger wasn't always better, as some larger dogs had texture issues. Two products were downgraded for their off-putting textures: one was too dry, the other too wet and squishy. The ideal hot dog has a bouncy, snappy texture and a moderate moisture level; from our prior investigating in other sausage stories, we know that this ideal texture is achieved, in part, by a proper balance of fat and protein. So we scrutinized the ingredient labels and compared fat and protein levels. Though they all contained similar amounts of protein, the dog that tasters deemed dry was far too lean, with less than half the fat of our winner—about 7 grams of fat compared with 15 grams of fat in our top-ranked product. We preferred dogs with more fat, which were tender and juicy with just the right amount of bounce and snap.

But what about the wet, squishy dog? While it had fat and protein levels similar to the top-ranked products, it contained twice as many carbohydrates as any of the other samples. While most manufacturers bulk up their hot dogs with added corn or corn syrup for a smoother texture and a sweeter flavor, our science editor explained that this product likely used too much—as evidenced by the high carbohydrate levels—making for a mushy and wet dog.

As for flavor, too much corn or corn syrup also had a big impact. Hot dogs that listed corn products as primary ingredients tended to be too sweet, while our favorites either contained no corn products or reported adding "2% or less" on ingredient lists. Spice was also important: While manufacturers wouldn't tell us exactly what spices they

RECOMMENDED

NATHAN'S FAMOUS
Skinless Beef Franks
Price: $6.99 for 8 hot dogs ($0.87 per hot dog)
Weight of One Dog 51 g
Width: 0.87 in **Fat:** 15 g
Carbohydrates: 1 g
Sodium: 550 mg

TASTERS' NOTES: This product emerged as top dog for its "supersmoky" meatiness and "juicy," "snappy" texture. Tasters thought these "plump" hot dogs were the "perfect size" and gave a "nice contrast to the bun." "This is my ideal dog," said one happy taster.

KAYEM
Skinless Beef Hot Dogs
Price: $5.99 for 8 hot dogs ($0.75 per hot dog)
Weight of One Dog 50 g
Width: 0.87 in **Fat:** 13 g
Carbohydrates: 1 g
Sodium: 440 mg

Another "big and substantial" dog, this "juicy" sausage was "meaty" and "tender," with "just the right amount of smoke." Tasters thought the "mild," "subtle" spice blend used in this product was "classic" and "familiar."

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

BAR-S
Premium Beef Franks
Price: $3.25 for 8 hot dogs ($0.41 per hot dog)
Weight of One Dog 41 g
Width: 0.77 in **Fat:** 14 g
Carbohydrates: 2 g
Sodium: 536 mg

These dogs were plenty "meaty" and "juicy," with a "firm" texture, though a few tasters noted a "sour" aftertaste. While these dogs were slightly too "small" for some tasters, most agreed that they had a "salty" kick and a "hint of smoke" that stood up against the bun.

HEBREW NATIONAL
Beef Franks
Price: $6.49 for 7 hot dogs ($0.93 per hot dog)
Weight of One Dog 47 g
Width: 0.76 in **Fat:** 13 g
Carbohydrates: 2 g
Sodium: 459 mg

Tasters liked the "intensely savory" beefiness and "springy" texture of these dogs, but most thought these "slim," "skinny" sausages weren't big enough for a standard bun. Still, many praised this product for its "juicy" tenderness and "slightly spicy" flavor.

OSCAR MAYER
Classic Beef Franks
Price: $5.99 for 10 hot dogs ($0.60 per hot dog)
Weight of One Dog 41 g
Width: 0.75 in **Fat:** 14 g
Carbohydrates: 1 g
Sodium: 393 mg

These "very skinny" sausages were among the smallest in our lineup, and while tasters liked their "smoky" meatiness, most thought they got "lost in the bun." Some also thought these dogs, which list corn syrup as their third ingredient, were a little too sweet.

NOT RECOMMENDED

BALL PARK
Beef Franks
Price: $4.99 for 8 hot dogs ($0.62 per hot dog)
Weight of One Dog 50 g
Width: 0.83 in **Fat:** 14 g
Carbohydrates: 4 g
Sodium: 481 mg

"Mush mush mush!" said one taster complaining about these "spongy," "flabby" sausages, which were likened to "school cafeteria hot dogs." The few tasters that could get past the "creepy soft" texture found these dogs dominated by a "sweet" "bologna-y" flavor.

APPLEGATE
The Great Organic Uncured Beef Hot Dog
Price: $6.49 for 7 hot dogs ($0.93 per hot dog)
Weight of One Dog 48 g
Width: 0.8 in **Fat:** 7 g
Carbohydrates: 0 g
Sodium: 292 mg

Tasters likened the "odd," "tart" flavors in this hot dog to "cabbage," "broccoli," "sea water," and "low tide." Equally unimpressive was this dog's "crumbly," "mealy" texture, which left a "cottony" dryness in tasters' mouths.

All nutritional information is calculated for a standard 50-gram serving size.

A Peek Inside the Test Kitchen

We do a lot of work before our tasters sit down to evaluate a food like hot dogs. After our preliminary research, we confirm product details and availability with every producer, buy the product locally, pretaste to work out any kinks (like appropriate sample size), print tasting sheets, set the tasting table, cook the samples concurrently, assemble the tasting panel, and bring it all to the table hot. Hot dog, indeed.

Photo: Kevin White

Equipment Review Kitchen Timers

Timing is everything—don't use just anything. BY HANNAH CROWLEY

Dog's Best Friend

These days, hot dogs are served in oblong buns, but until the early 20th century, they were typically eaten bunless. Though historians aren't exactly sure how hot dog buns were invented, one version of the story claims that the buns were introduced in 1904 by a clever vendor in St. Louis named Anton Feuchtwanger, who reportedly loaned customers his gloves to hold hot sausages as they ate. Since patrons often wandered off with the gloves, Feuchtwanger asked the family baker to create long rolls that fit the hot dogs—and so the hot dog bun was (supposedly) born. We like to wrap our dogs in **Pepperidge Farm Hot Dog Buns**, which won our previous tastings for their slightly crusty exterior and subtle yeastiness. To read our testing, go to **CooksCountry.com/hotdogbuns**.

THERE'S NOTHING LIKE a spectacular kitchen failure, replete with leathery meat, disintegrated vegetables, or, worse yet, billowing smoke to drive home the importance of timing in cooking. Most every smartphone, tablet, oven, or microwave has a timer these days, so why use a dedicated kitchen timer? Kitchen timers are more durable and moisture-resistant than other electronics, and they're more versatile than appliance timers, with extra features like the ability to track multiple things at once, longer ranges, or the capacity to count up once the timer has sounded to track elapsed time.

When we last tested digital multi-event kitchen timers, the American Innovative Chef's Quad Timer Professional was the winner. But it's not perfect (it's a bit confusing to operate and can't be set for less than 1 minute), and so a slew of new options inspired us to take another look at these products.

We rounded up 12 new digital timers, choosing those that could track between two and four events at once, and pitted them against our old winner. All models were priced between $11.49 and $49.95. We were hard on our timers, because a good kitchen timer should be brutishly durable, unfailingly accurate, and dead easy to use. To see how easy the timers were to use in a hot, busy kitchen, we used them to make pizza dough that required five different timing increments and soft-boiled eggs that cooked for precisely 6 minutes and 30 seconds. We also knocked them off kitchen counters, smeared them with sticky dough and flour, and mopped them up with sopping wet dish towels.

Two factors, accuracy and durability, were nonnegotiable—a broken or inexact timer is about as useful as a mesh umbrella. We tested each unit's timers against the official time kept by the National Institute of Standards and Technology and were pleasantly surprised to find that all the timers were accurate. They also all emerged from our durability testing intact. But that didn't mean we liked them all, as a surprising number of secondary factors decided each timer's fate.

Most important was how easy the timers were to set and reset. We found that some timers had extra "confirming" steps; for example, if you wanted to set the time for 1 minute, you also had to confirm that you wanted zero seconds, instead of just entering 1 minute and pressing "start." The best products took three steps: select one of the timers, enter desired time, and press "start." Resetting some timers required us to press multiple buttons simultaneously; others had us hold down one button for a length of time. Testers preferred obvious "clear" buttons that they could hit once with a single finger.

The final factors were small but important design elements that made timers easy to use: legible displays; comfortably audible alerts; compact, stable formats; large, clearly labeled buttons, and displays that showed all of the unit's timers simultaneously.

One model had everything we wanted, plus a unique innovation. Most timers had hours, minutes, and seconds buttons that you press and scroll through to set; better models can reverse so that if you overshoot your time you don't have to start over, but our new winner was the only timer with a direct-entry keypad with numbers 0 to 9, so users can type in the exact time they want without scrolling.

We have no doubt that technology will continue to develop, at some point, smart devices will be more durable and appliance timers more sophisticated, so we will continue to monitor their development. But until then the accurate, durable, stable OXO Good Grips Triple Timer ($19.99) is the best you can buy. We especially love its direct-entry keypad and smart, simple design that makes time your friend, not your foe.

KEY: Good ★★★ Fair ★★ Poor ★

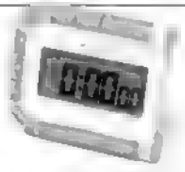
RECOMMENDED

OXO
Good Grips Triple Timer
Model: 1071501
Price: $19.99
Number of Timers: 3
Range: 99 hr, 59 min, 59 sec
Settable for: Hours, minutes, seconds
Dimensions: 3 x 2.5 x 3.75 in
Extra Features: Clock, stopwatch, time elapsed, memory

Intuitiveness ★★★
Ease of Use ★★★
Design ★★½
Versatility ★★★
Display + Alerts ★★½
Cleanup + Durability ★★★

Comments: This sturdy, intuitive timer has a dedicated "clear" button and a full 0-to-9 keypad.

MEASUPRO
Digital Timer, Clock, and Stopwatch
Model: CCT400
Price: $14.99
Number of Timers: 4
Range: 23 hr, 59 min, 59 sec
Settable for: Hours, minutes, seconds
Dimensions: 2.8 x 0.75 x 2.4 in
Extra Features: Clock, stopwatch, time elapsed, memory, magnet



Intuitiveness ★★★
Ease of Use ★★½
Design ★★
Versatility ★★★
Display + Alerts ★★½
Cleanup + Durability ★★★

Comments: We liked this timer's clearly labeled, single-purpose buttons, bold display, and small footprint. But it was a little tippy and showed only one timer at a time.

RECOMMENDED WITH RESERVATIONS

MAVERICK
Redi-Check Four Line Timer
Model: TM-09
Price: $14.99
Number of Timers: 4
Range: 99 hr, 59 min, 59 sec
Settable for: Hours, minutes, seconds
Dimensions: 3.6 x 1.25 x 2.75 in
Extra Features: Clock, stopwatch, time elapsed, magnet

Intuitiveness ★★★
Ease of Use ★★½
Design ★★½
Versatility ★★★
Display + Alerts ★★
Cleanup + Durability ★★

Comments: This compact, intuitive timer's audio alerts were a bit shrill, and it showed only one timer at a time.

MARATHON
Large Display 100 Hour
Dual Count Up/Down Timer
Model: TI030017BK (black)
Price: $14.99
Number of Timers: 2
Range: 99 hr, 59 min, 59 sec
Settable for: Hours, minutes, seconds
Dimensions: 3.5 x 0.6 x 3 in
Extra Features: Stopwatch, time elapsed, memory, magnet

Intuitiveness ★★½
Ease of Use ★½
Design ★★
Versatility ★★★
Display + Alerts ★★★
Cleanup + Durability ★★★

Comments: This reasonably intuitive timer had a few nice features (clear digits, volume options), but resetting the time took two hands and too much effort.

Visit **CooksCountry.com/july16** to read the full results of our testing and to see the nine lower-rated models that aren't pictured here.

Photo: Berenice Abbott (circa 1930)

Heirloom Recipe

We're looking for recipes that you treasure—the ones that have been handed down in your family for a generation or more; that always come out for the holidays; that have earned a place at your table and in your heart, through many years of meals. Send us the recipes that spell home to you. Visit **CooksCountry.com/magazines/home** (or write to Heirloom Recipes, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447); click on Heirloom Recipes and tell us a little about the recipe. Include your name and mailing address. **If we print your recipe, you'll receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*.**

JOE'S SPECIAL

"I enjoyed this dish a long time ago when my parents took me to Original Joe's in San Francisco. This is my version of what I fondly remember as the best breakfast ever." –Valerie Swift, San Jose, Calif.

Serves 4

We like to serve this with toasted sourdough bread and extra hot sauce, such as Frank's RedHot Original Cayenne Pepper Sauce.

- 8 large eggs
- ¼ cup half-and-half
- Salt and pepper
- 4 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 12 ounces cremini mushrooms, trimmed and sliced thin
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 onion, quartered and sliced thin crosswise
- 12 ounces 85 percent lean ground beef
- 1 tablespoon Worcestershire sauce
- 1 tablespoon hot sauce, plus extra for serving
- 10 ounces (10 cups) baby spinach
- 2 ounces Parmesan cheese, grated (1 cup)

1. Whisk eggs, half and half, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper together in bowl; set aside. Melt 2 tablespoons butter in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat. Add mushrooms and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook, covered, until mushrooms release their liquid, about 5 minutes. Uncover and continue to cook until lightly browned, about 5 minutes longer. Stir in half of garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Transfer to bowl, cover with aluminum foil, and set aside.

2. Melt remaining 2 tablespoons butter in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat. Add onion and ¼ teaspoon salt and cook, covered, until onion is softened, about 5 minutes. Stir in beef and cook, uncovered, breaking up meat with spatula, until no longer pink, 5 to 7 minutes. Stir in remaining garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in Worcestershire and hot sauce.

3. Stir half of spinach into beef mixture and cook until just wilted, about 1 minute. Stir in remaining spinach and cook until just wilted, about 1 minute longer. Pour egg mixture into skillet and, using rubber spatula, stir and scrape bottom of skillet, combining beef mixture and eggs, until large curds begin to form and eggs are fully set, 3 to 5 minutes.

4. Off heat, stir in ½ cup Parmesan and season with salt and pepper to taste. Transfer to serving platter and top with reserved mushrooms and remaining ½ cup Parmesan. Serve with extra hot sauce.

COMING NEXT ISSUE

Summer's in full swing! We'll have a slew of backyard recipes perfect for the season, from **Hawaiian Fried Chicken** to **Smoky Stuffed Potatoes** to **South Carolina Smoked Ham**. Follow up with a slice of **Oregon Blackberry Pie**, and wash it all down with one of our **Five Easy Lemonades**.

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RC = Recipe Card

FIND THE ROOSTER!

A tiny version of this rooster has been hidden in the pages of this issue. Write to us with its location and we'll enter you in a random drawing. The first correct entry drawn will win our winning kitchen timer, and each of the next five will receive a free one-year subscription to *Cook's Country*. To enter, visit **CooksCountry.com/rooster** by July 31, 2016, or write to Rooster JJ16, *Cook's Country*, P.O. Box 470739, Brookline, MA 02447. Include your name and address. Jean Munch of Cincinnati, Ohio, found the rooster in the February/March 2016 issue on page 8 and won our favorite springform pan.

WEB EXTRAS

Free for 4 months at **CooksCountry.com**

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- Chicken Baked in Foil with Fennel and Sun-Dried Tomatoes
- Gazpacho
- Grilled Broccoli with Anchovy-Garlic Butter
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- Tomato Casserole

EXPANDED REVIEWS:

- Tasting Hot Dog Buns
- Testing Chimney Starters
- Testing Grill Lights
- Testing Kitchen Timers

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30 MINUTE SUPPER

SKILLET BEEF ENCHILADAS

30 MINUTE SUPPER

CRISPY FALAFEL PITA WITH YOGURT SAUCE

30 MINUTE SUPPER

GRILLED PORK TENDERLOIN
WITH TOMATO-ONION SALAD

30 MINUTE SUPPER

SMOKY BEEF SKEWERS
WITH CORN AND BLACK BEAN SALAD

CRISPY FALAFEL PITA WITH YOGURT SAUCE Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Pita bread serves as both the sandwich pocket and the starchy binder for the chickpea patties

- 2½ (8-inch) pita breads
- 1 (15-ounce) can chickpeas, rinsed
- ¼ cup chopped fresh parsley
- 1 large egg
- 1½ teaspoons ground cumin
- Salt and pepper
- 1 cup plain whole-milk yogurt
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice
- 2 vine-ripened tomatoes, chopped (1 cup)
- ½ cup vegetable oil

1. Tear ½ pita into small pieces and process in food processor until finely ground, about 15 seconds. Add chickpeas, 2 tablespoons parsley, egg, 1 teaspoon cumin, ¾ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper and pulse until chickpeas are coarsely chopped and mixture is cohesive, about 10 pulses. Divide mixture into 16 patties, about 2 inches in diameter

2. Whisk yogurt, lemon juice, remaining 2 tablespoons parsley, remaining ½ teaspoon cumin, ½ teaspoon salt, and ½ teaspoon pepper together in bowl. Season tomatoes with salt and pepper to taste

3. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Fry patties until golden brown, about 2 minutes per side. Cut remaining 2 pitas in half and stuff each pocket with ¼ cup tomatoes, 4 falafel, and ¼ cup yogurt sauce. Serve

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Our favorite brand of canned chickpeas is Pastene

SKILLET BEEF ENCHILADAS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Frying the tortilla strips keeps them from becoming soggy while they simmer in the sauce

- 2 tablespoons vegetable oil
- 12 corn tortillas, halved and cut crosswise into 1-inch-wide strips
- 1 pound 90 percent lean ground beef
- 1 onion, chopped fine
- ½ teaspoon salt
- 1 (15-ounce) can enchilada sauce
- 6 ounces Colby Jack cheese, shredded (1½ cups)
- 1 (2.25-ounce) can sliced black olives, drained
- 3 scallions, sliced thin on bias
- Sour cream

1. Heat oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium heat until shimmering. Add tortilla strips and fry until spotty brown, about 7 minutes; transfer to paper towel–lined plate

2. Cook beef, onion, and salt in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat, breaking up meat with spoon, until browned, about 6 minutes. Reduce heat to medium and stir in enchilada sauce and 2 cups tortilla strips. Simmer until slightly thickened, about 5 minutes. Sprinkle remaining 1 cup tortilla strips, Colby Jack, olives, and scallions over top. Reduce heat to low and cook until cheese is melted, about 3 minutes. Serve with sour cream

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: For a spicy kick, use pepper Jack cheese

SMOKY BEEF SKEWERS WITH CORN AND BLACK BEAN SALAD Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Chipotle powder seasons the meat before it hits the grill and adds smoky heat to the sour cream sauce

- ½ cup sour cream
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- ½ teaspoon grated lime zest plus 2 tablespoons juice
- Salt and pepper
- 1 teaspoon chipotle chile powder
- 2 cups fresh or thawed frozen corn
- 1 (15-ounce) can black beans, rinsed
- 2 scallions, sliced thin
- 2 tablespoons chopped fresh cilantro plus 2 tablespoons cilantro leaves
- 1½ pounds sirloin steak tips, trimmed and cut into 1-inch chunks

1. Whisk sour cream, oil, lime juice, ¾ teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon chile powder, and ⅛ teaspoon pepper together in large bowl; transfer ¼ cup sour cream mixture to small bowl and set aside. Add corn, beans, scallions, chopped cilantro, and lime zest to remaining sour cream mixture and toss to combine; transfer to platter

2. Pat steak dry with paper towels and sprinkle with ¾ teaspoon salt, ½ teaspoon pepper, and remaining ½ teaspoon chile powder. Thread steak onto four 12-inch metal skewers. Grill skewers over hot fire until meat is browned on all sides, 5 to 7 minutes. Transfer to platter with corn salad and drizzle with reserved sour cream mixture. Sprinkle with cilantro leaves and serve

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: If using a gas grill, cover while cooking in step 2.

GRILLED PORK TENDERLOIN WITH TOMATO-ONION SALAD Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Ground fennel adheres well to the pork and imparts more flavor than whole fennel seeds

- 1 tablespoon ground fennel
- Salt and pepper
- 2 (12-ounce) pork tenderloins, trimmed
- 1 red onion, sliced into ¼-inch-thick rounds
- 3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil
- 4 plum tomatoes, cored and sliced ¼ inch thick
- ¼ cup chopped fresh basil
- 2 tablespoons capers, rinsed
- 2 tablespoons red wine vinegar

1. Combine fennel, 1 teaspoon salt, and 1 teaspoon pepper in bowl. Pat pork dry with paper towels and sprinkle with fennel mixture. Grill pork over hot fire, turning occasionally, until well browned and registering 140 degrees, 12 to 15 minutes. Transfer to carving board, tent with foil, and let rest for 5 minutes

2. Meanwhile, brush onion with 1 tablespoon oil and sprinkle with ¼ teaspoon salt and ¼ teaspoon pepper. Grill onion over hot fire until lightly charred, about 2 minutes per side; transfer to large bowl. Add tomatoes, basil, capers, vinegar, and remaining 2 tablespoons oil to bowl with onion and toss to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Slice pork and serve with salad

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You can substitute vine-ripened or heirloom tomatoes for the plum tomatoes.

30-MINUTE SUPPER

WHOLE-GRAIN MUSTARD CHICKEN SALAD

30-MINUTE SUPPER

SPAGHETTI WITH SAUSAGE AND PEPPERS

30-MINUTE SUPPER

PAN-SEARED PAPRIKA SALMON
WITH SPICY GREEN BEANS

30-MINUTE SUPPER

PAN-SEARED CHICKEN
WITH WARM MEDITERRANEAN GRAIN PILAF

SPAGHETTI WITH SAUSAGE AND PEPPERS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: As the sausage cooks, the fat renders and coats the onion and peppers to add even more meaty flavor.

- **1 pound hot Italian sausage, casings removed**
- **2 red bell peppers, stemmed, seeded, and sliced thin**
- **1 red onion, halved and sliced thin**
- **3 garlic cloves, sliced thin**
- **1 (14.5-ounce) can crushed tomatoes**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **1 pound spaghetti**
- **2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **Grated Parmesan cheese**

1. Cook sausage, peppers, and onion in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat, breaking up meat with spoon, until lightly browned and cooked through, about 12 minutes. Add garlic and cook until fragrant, about 30 seconds. Stir in tomatoes, 1 teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper; bring to boil. Reduce heat to medium and simmer, uncovered, until sauce is slightly thickened, about 5 minutes.

2. Meanwhile, bring 4 quarts water to boil in large pot. Add pasta and 1 tablespoon salt and cook, stirring often, until al dente. Reserve ½ cup cooking water, then drain pasta and return it to pot. Add sauce and oil and toss to combine. Adjust consistency with reserved cooking water as needed. Serve, passing Parmesan separately.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: If you prefer a less spicy dish, substitute sweet Italian sausage.

WHOLE-GRAIN MUSTARD CHICKEN SALAD Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Fresh lemon juice brightens this light and summery version of chicken salad, while sugar snap peas and red grapes add a juicy crunch.

- **8 ounces sugar snap peas, strings removed**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **½ cup whole-grain mustard**
- **3 tablespoons lemon juice**
- **2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 (2½-pound) rotisserie chicken, skin and bones discarded, meat shredded into bite-size pieces (3 cups)**
- **1 cup red grapes, halved**
- **3 tablespoons minced fresh chives**
- **4 whole red leaf lettuce leaves**

1. Bring 6 cups water to boil in large saucepan. Add snap peas and 1 teaspoon salt and cook until slightly tender, about 2 minutes. Fill large bowl halfway with ice and water. Drain snap peas, then transfer to ice bath to cool completely. Drain again, transfer to salad spinner, and spin to remove excess moisture.

2. Whisk mustard, lemon juice, oil, ½ teaspoon pepper, and ¼ teaspoon salt together in large bowl. Stir in chicken, grapes, chives, and snap peas until combined. Season with salt and pepper to taste.

3. Place 1 lettuce leaf on each of 4 plates. Place 1 cup chicken salad on each lettuce leaf. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: You can substitute more delicate Bibb lettuce leaves if you prefer.

PAN-SEARED CHICKEN WITH WARM MEDITERRANEAN GRAIN PILAF Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Deglazing the pan after searing the chicken releases the browned bits and creates a flavorful broth for cooking the bulgur.

- **4 (6- to 8-ounce) boneless, skinless chicken breasts, trimmed**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **3 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus extra for drizzling**
- **1½ cups water**
- **1 cup fine-grind bulgur**
- **10 ounces cherry tomatoes, halved**
- **4 ounces feta cheese, crumbled (1 cup)**
- **¾ cup minced fresh parsley**
- **½ cup pitted kalamata olives, halved**
- **1 tablespoon lemon juice, plus wedges for serving**

1. Pat chicken dry with paper towels and season with salt and pepper. Heat 1 tablespoon oil in 12-inch skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook chicken until golden brown and registering 160 degrees, 6 to 8 minutes per side. Transfer to cutting board and tent with foil.

2. Add water to pan and bring to boil over medium-high heat, scraping up any browned bits. Stir in bulgur and ½ teaspoon salt. Cover, remove from heat, and let rest for 5 minutes. Fluff with fork. Add tomatoes, feta, parsley, olives, lemon juice, and remaining 2 tablespoons oil and stir to combine. Season with salt and pepper to taste. Slice chicken and serve with bulgur salad and lemon wedges, drizzled with extra oil.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: Do not use coarse- or medium-grind bulgur in this recipe.

PAN-SEARED PAPRIKA SALMON WITH SPICY GREEN BEANS Serves 4

WHY THIS RECIPE WORKS: Since the intense heat needed to blister the green beans would burn minced garlic, we smash the garlic cloves instead. The bigger pieces release intense garlic flavor without burning.

- **1¼ teaspoons smoked paprika**
- **Salt and pepper**
- **4 (6- to 8-ounce) skin-on salmon fillets, 1¼ inches thick**
- **4 teaspoons extra-virgin olive oil**
- **1 pound green beans, trimmed**
- **6 garlic cloves, smashed**
- **2 tablespoons water**
- **½ cup jarred hot banana pepper rings**

1. Combine 1 teaspoon paprika, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper in bowl. Pat salmon dry with paper towels and sprinkle with paprika mixture. Heat 1 teaspoon oil in 12-inch nonstick skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Cook fillets until well browned and centers register 125 degrees (for medium-rare), 4 to 5 minutes per side. Transfer to platter and sprinkle with remaining ¼ teaspoon paprika. Wipe out skillet with paper towels.

2. Heat remaining 1 tablespoon oil in now-empty skillet over medium-high heat until just smoking. Add green beans, garlic, ½ teaspoon salt, and ¼ teaspoon pepper and cook, stirring often, until green beans and garlic turn spotty brown, about 6 minutes. Add water, cover, and reduce heat to medium. Cook until green beans are crisp-tender, about 1 minute. Off heat, stir in pepper rings and season with salt and pepper to taste. Serve.

TEST KITCHEN NOTE: For salmon fillets of even thickness, look for center-cut fillets.

THE GREAT AMERICAN CAKE

Cracker Jack Ice Cream Cake

Sweeten up the seventh-inning stretch with this home run of a cake.

TO MAKE THIS CAKE, YOU WILL NEED:

- **½ cup caramel topping**
- **¼ cup peanut butter**
- **1½ quarts vanilla ice cream**
- **½ cup unsalted dry-roasted peanuts, chopped**
- **1 (9-inch) white cake round***
- **2 (1-ounce) boxes Cracker Jack**

FOR THE ICE CREAM CORE: Line 3-cup bowl with plastic wrap, letting ends of plastic overhang bowl by several inches. Combine caramel and peanut butter in small bowl; set aside. Scoop 2 cups ice cream into medium bowl and mash with wooden spoon until softened. Stir in peanuts until combined. Add ¼ cup caramel mixture and fold until swirled into ice cream. Scrape into plastic-lined bowl and smooth top. Wrap with plastic and freeze until firm, about 6 hours.

TO ASSEMBLE: Line 10-cup bowl with plastic, letting ends of plastic overhang bowl by several inches. Scoop remaining 4 cups ice cream into medium bowl and mash with wooden spoon until softened. Scrape softened ice cream into plastic-lined 10-cup bowl. Working quickly, unwrap caramel-swirled ice cream, discard plastic, and press, round side down, into softened ice cream until flush with level of ice cream. Place cake round over top, trimming sides as necessary so cake fits inside bowl. Wrap with plastic and freeze until completely firm, about 6 hours.

TO SERVE: When ready to serve, unmold and discard plastic. Place cake side down on plate or pedestal. Drizzle remaining caramel mixture over top, then mound Cracker Jack in center. Serve immediately.

Go to **CooksCountry.com/singlewhitecakeround** for our Single White Cake Round recipe, or use your own.

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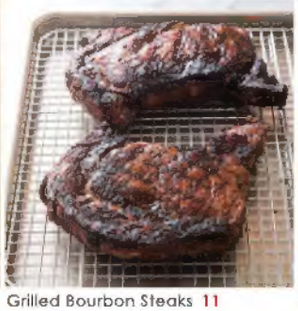
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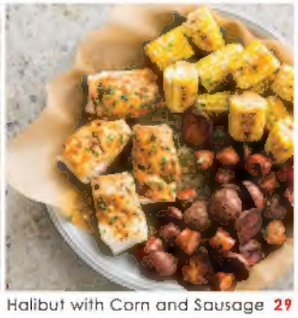
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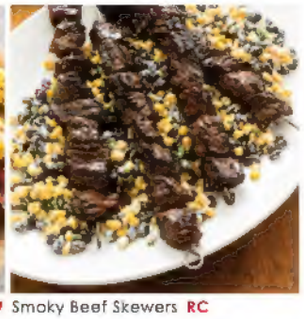
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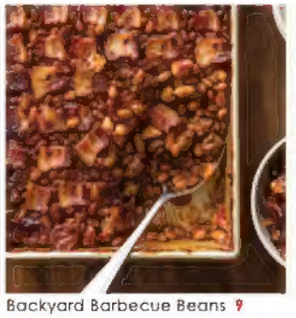
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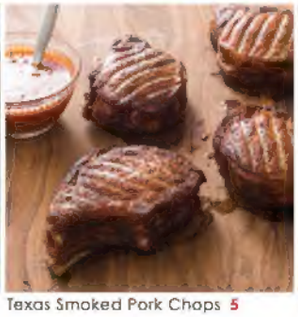
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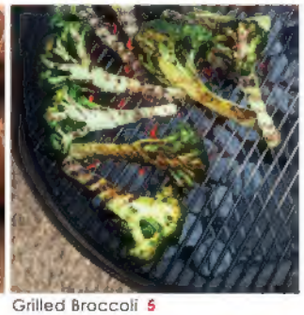
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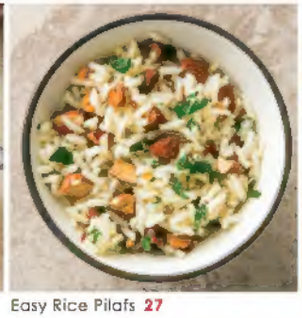
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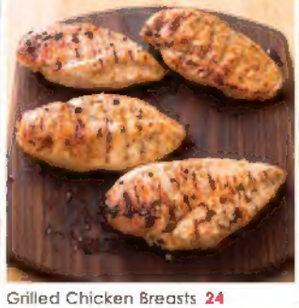
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